An Abecedary of the Mid-Tenth Century B.C.E. from the Judaean Shephelah

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Near the conclusion of the 2005 excavation season at Tel Zayit, Israel, the Zeitah Excavations recovered a large stone bearing an incised, two-line inscription. The special importance of the stone derives not only from its archaic alphabetic text (a 22-letter abecedary), but also from its well-defined archaeological context in a structure dating securely to the tenth century B.C.E. The borderland site of Tel Zayit lies in the lowlands district of Judah, and in the early Iron Age IIA period it maintained its principal affiliations with the highland culture to the east, in the direction of Jerusalem. After locating the site in its ancient physical setting, this article presents a detailed description of the archaeological context that yielded the inscribed stone, the comparative evidence for studying the inscription, and a palaeographical analysis of each letter of the abecedary itself. The Tel Zayit Abecedary represents the linear alphabetic script of central and southern Canaan at the beginning of the first millennium B.C.E., a transitional script that developed from the Phoenician tradition of the early Iron Age and anticipated the distinctive features of the mature Hebrew national script. The early appearance of literacy at Tel Zayit will play a pivotal role in the current discussion of the archaeology and history of Judah in the tenth century B.C.E.

INTRODUCTION

The near 30-dunam site of Tel Zayit lies in the strategic Beth Guvrin Valley in the Shephelah region of ancient Judah, 1.76 km west and 7.06 km north of Lachish, 1.66 km west and 8.09 km south of Tell eṣ-Ṣâfi, and 26.96 km east and .74 km south of Ashkelon (see fig. 1).[1] Since 1999, exploration[2] at the site has proceeded under the direction of R. E. Tappy and the sponsorship of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.[3]

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[1] For reference, see Israel-Palestine Grid Coordinates 133960–115260 (OIG); 183960–615260 (NIG); Map Gat 94. Tel Zayit is also located 13.71 km west and 13.37 km south of Beth-Shemesh and 8.66 km west and 25.52 km south of Gezer (see fig. 1).

[2] Previously, this unexcavated site received only meager attention in various informal and more systematic surveys in the area (see Conder and Kitchener 1883: 258; Aharoni and Amiran 1954: 224; *Had. Arkh.* 1979: 31; Dagan 1992: 153). For notes on the 19th- to 20th-century C.E. Arab village at Tel Zayit, see also Khalidi, ed. 1992: 227.

[3] In addition, this project is affiliated with the American Schools of Oriental Research and the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research.

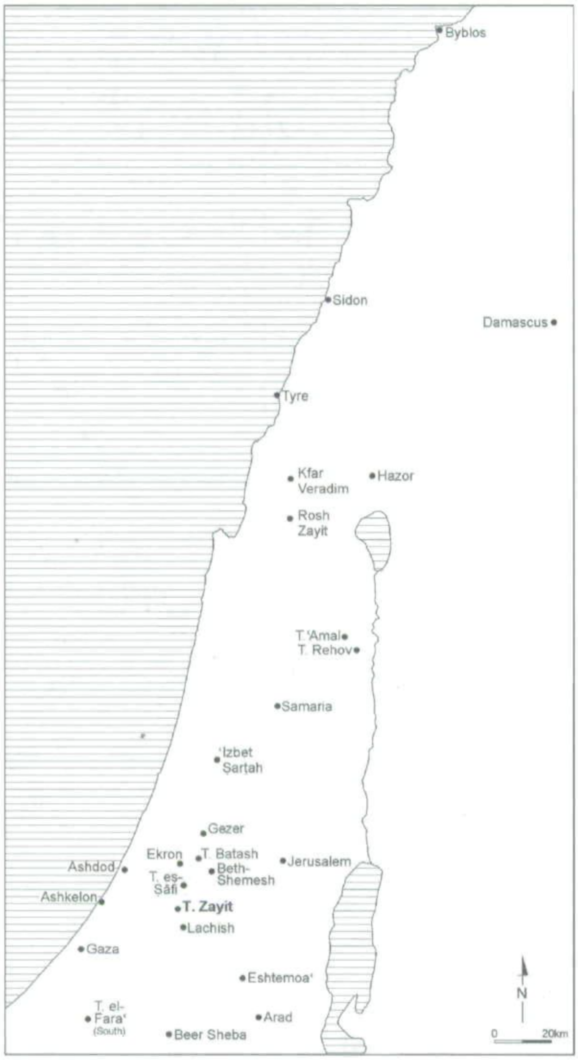

Fig. 1. Map of Israel showing principal sites with comparative archaeological or epigraphic data.

On July 15, 2005, the final day of the 2005 season, excavators discovered at Tel Zayit a heavy (17.33 kg) limestone boulder (37.5 cm × 27 cm; 15.7 cm in height) with two lines of letters clearly incised on one side and a large, bowl-shaped hollow (18.5 cm × 14.5 cm; 6.7 cm deep) ground into the other side. The importance of this discovery derives not only from the archaic alphabetic inscription displayed on the stone, but also from its well-defined archaeological context.

The stone was used in the construction of a wall (Locus 2307/2389) belonging to a structure that dates to the tenth century B.C.E. (Local Level III) and that suffered heavy destruction by fire sometime late in that period. Multiple deposits that subsequently sealed the destruction debris (described below) accumulated to a depth of over 1 m and represent two distinct building levels (with the later one also ending in a conflagration) and three related subphases ranging from the early ninth through the early eighth centuries B.C.E. (see table 1). While the stone itself lay in Wall 2307/2389 in at least secondary (perhaps tertiary) use, the secure archaeological context in which it was discovered provides a firm terminus ante quem both for the building to which it belonged and for the inscription it displays.

THE SITE OF TEL ZAYIT IN ITS PHYSICAL SETTING

A borderland site, Tel Zayit lies in the western foothills of Judah. Its remains from the tenth century B.C.E. exhibit stronger links with the highland culture to the east than with the coastal culture of the Philistine plain. As regional survey data have shown, at least three principal north–south and three east–west roadways through the lowlands of Judah converged near Tel Zayit during various phases of the Iron Age.[4] The longitudinal roads connected Egypt and the northern Sinai Peninsula with the southernmost Philistine capital at Gaza and the lowland area of Judah. Three laterally oriented routes linking coastal centers with the interior hill country exploited the natural landscape by following the courses of three drainage systems that accommodate the runoff down the seaward slopes of the hill country. From north to south, these valleys are the Naḥal HaElah (with a road running from Tell eṣ-Ṣâfi to Azekah and continuing, by way of various routes, to the Judahite highlands between Bethlehem and the Ramah–Mizpah area), the Naḥal Guvrin (passing by Tel Zayit, Tel Goded, and Adullam to Khirbet Jedur [biblical Gedor] south of Bethlehem), and the Naḥal Lachish (from Ashkelon and its southern flank through the Lachish area and on to the hill country around and south of Hebron).[5] Tel Zayit lies at the western entrance to the central (Naḥal Guvrin) arena.

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[4] See Dorsey 1991: 67–70, with 58, Map No.1; also 189–92, 196, with 182, Map No. 13, and 195, Map No. 14.

[5] These three systems fit into a broader series of east–west wadis that descend from the hill country as follows (from north to south): the Valley of Ayalon, the Vale of Sorek, Naḥal HaElah, the Valley of Zephatha (= Naḥal Guvrin), Naḥal Lachish, and Wadi el-Ḥesi (modern Naḥal Adorayim, which merges with Naḥal Shiqma just southeast of Tell el-Ḥesi).

TABLE 1. Depositional History of Early Iron Age Levels

Stratum/Phase	*Square*	*Principal Cultural Affinities*	*Date* (B.C.E.)
Subphase 1a	N20	Coastal – inland	8th century
Local Level I	N20, O20	Coastal – inland; *destroyed by fire*	second half of 9th century
Subphase 2a	O19, O20	Inland ?	mid-9th century
Subphase 2b	O19, O20	Inland ?	mid-9th century
Local Level II	O20	Inland	first half of 9th century
Local Level III (with abecedary)	N18, O19, O20, P20	Inland; *destroyed by fire*	mid–late 10th century

This convergence of geological and archaeological history correlates well with the outline given in Joshua 15:33–44 of the districts and cities belonging to Judah.[6] The author(s) of that text organized the settlements of the Shephelah, or "Lowlands" area, into three geographical groups that follow roughly the Elah (vv. 35–36 = District 2),[7] Lachish (vv. 37–41 = District 3), and Guvrin (vv. 42–44 = District 4) systems.[8] In each instance, the text appears to identify the natural regime and its political organization by naming a principal (and, in the case of District 4, the westernmost) municipality in the given area before adding a brief list of satellite sites associated with it. The writer names nine towns in the Naḥal Guvrin–District 4 area, with Libnah apparently representing the main city here. These facts are relevant for the ancient identity of Tel Zayit, which undoubtedly relates in some way to the list of sites in the Libnah district (vv. 42–44) and may, in fact, point directly to Libnah itself.

In any event, the ancient town of Tel Zayit lay at the center of a communication network that connected the highland culture(s) of Judah to the Canaanite and Philistine city-states located near the hilly western flanks, along the Mediterranean seaboard, and toward the principal gateways into Egypt. The site's location at this topo-geographical, geological, and cultural interface constitutes an important consideration in the study of the history of the region and the interpretation of the Tel Zayit Abecedary.

DEPOSITIONAL HISTORY OF TEL ZAYIT IN THE EARLY IRON AGE II PERIOD

Excavation has revealed occupational levels from the Iron Age IIA period[9] on the eastern shoulder of the mound, in Squares N20, O20, and O19 (fig. 2).[10] Due to their proximity to the steep eastern slope of the tell, the easternmost portions of O20 and O19 suffered from considerable erosion of later deposits. The tenth- and most of the ninth-century levels, however, remained intact throughout the area. Until completion of the final ceramic and stratigraphic analyses, we shall refer to discernible strata or building periods as "local levels" within given excavation squares (see table 1), with the conclusions drawn here remaining preliminary in nature.

Subphase 1a

Below some scant remains from the Persian period, a beaten-earth floor covered and sealed an earlier level dating within the eighth century B.C.E. This

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[6] For additional literary and historical observations relating to this text, see Tappy 2000: 7–36, particularly nn. 8–9.

[7] From v. 33 through the first site listed in v. 35 (Jarmuth), this roster names eight sites in the Sorek and related valleys before moving to the Naḥal HaElah, for which we read seven sites, with the possible loss of the eighth town, Beth-Shemesh, from the roster (Rainey 1983: 7).

[8] For detailed studies of these districts, see the reference in n. 7 and also Rainey 1980. See also the comments in n. 41 below.

[9] For a succinct history of proposed subdivisions of the Iron Age, see A. Mazar 2005: 15–17.

[10] J. Rosenberg produced the map in fig. 1. Drawings and photographs in figs. 2–11 appear courtesy of R. E. Tappy, project director and field photographer; photographs in figs. 12–14 appear courtesy of Z. Radovan, Bible Land Pictures, Jerusalem; photographs in figs. 15–16 and 18–24 appear courtesy of B. Zuckerman and M. J. Lundberg, epigraphic photographers, West Semitic Research Project; drawings of the script in figs. 16–19 appear courtesy of P. Kyle McCarter, project epigraphist; and pottery drawings in figs. 3–4 were completed by Michael Smelansky, Jerusalem.

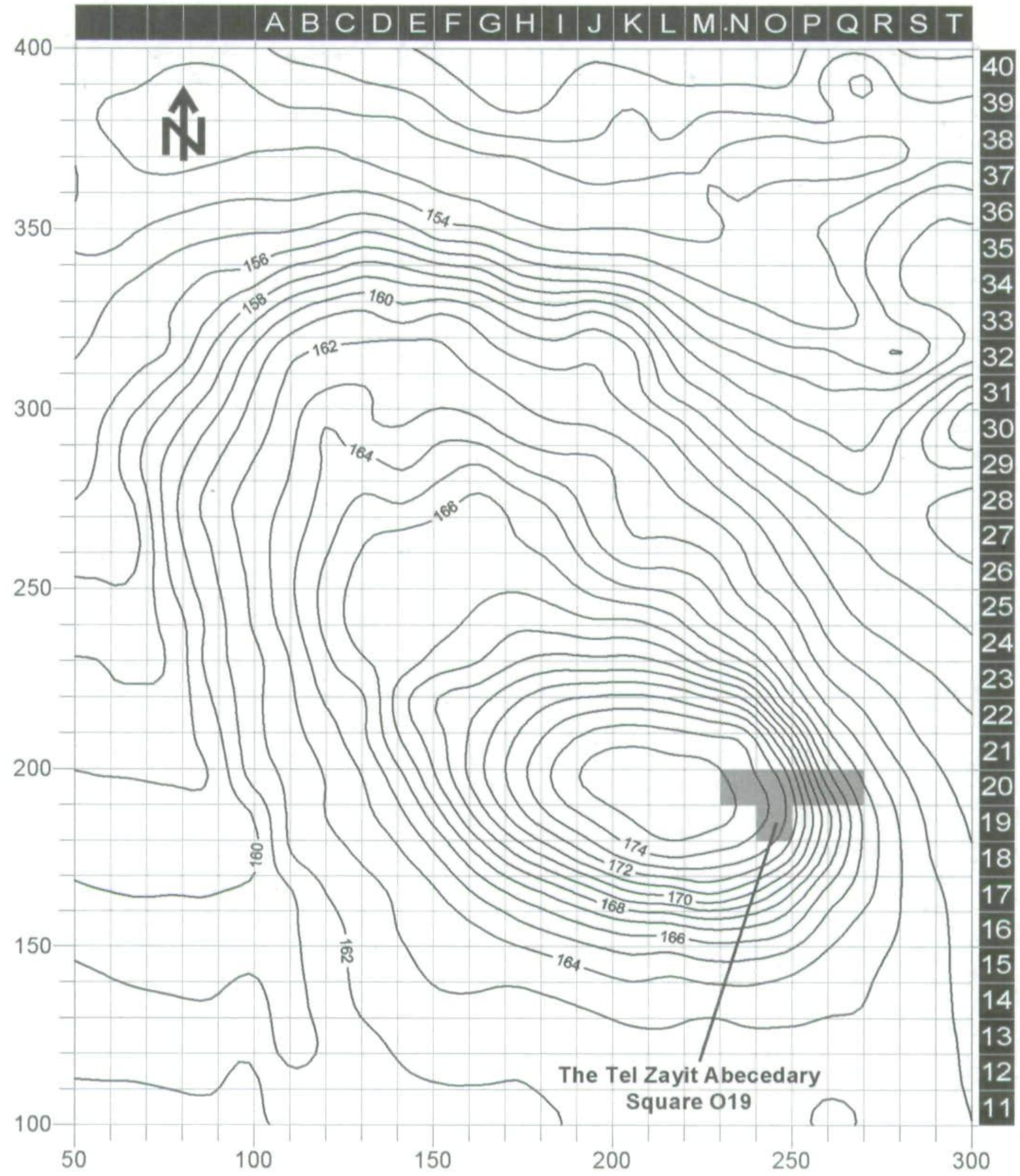

Fig. 2. Tel Zayit: Site plan showing location of excavated remains from the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age II periods.

phase included portions of two closely placed walls connected by a narrow strip of floor that ran between them. Five large amphorae and a large, globular-shaped jug rested directly on this surface and leaned against the eastern wall. These ovoid-/oval-shaped jars (e.g., fig. 3:1; see table 2), with their sharp shoulder breaks, very short necks (designed to receive a lid or stopper), and two large, vertical handles immediately below the juncture of the upper body and shoulder, are well known in Israel and Phoenicia during the Iron Age II period. Though these jars appear at other inland sites, such as Lachish[11] and Arad,[12] they seem to claim a coastal origin[13] and are prominent in late Iron II levels at Ekron, Ashdod, and Ashkelon, but they first occur in and apparently do not continue past Arad Stratum XI, which extends through the first half of the eighth century B.C.E.[14] The Tel Zayit jars display slightly slimmer bodies than the late eighth- to seventh-century examples and in this regard resemble more the nascent forms from Tel Batash Level III.[15] From roughly contemporary deposits in Square O19 at Tel Zayit, other coastal influences become evident in this period in a form that appears to represent a forerunner of the medium-sized, deep cooking pots with sharply protruding ridges on the exterior of their rims (fig. 4:4; see table 3).[16] Though this type of vessel typifies coastal industries of the later Iron Age (seventh century) in northern Philistia (i.e., inside the Meṣad Ḥashavyahu–Tel Batash–Tel Miqne–Ashdod region), the style begins already at Judahite borderland sites during the course of the eighth century B.C.E.[17]

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[11] Y. Aharoni 1975: SJ 230, pl. 48:9, 16 (Level II, which yielded a total of seven such jars; see p. 111).

[12] M. Aharoni 1981: fig. 9:5, from Stratum XI.

[13] See Zimhoni 1990: esp. 25–26 and fig. 17:4, Group IIID.

Despite Tel Zayit's strengthened contacts with the coast during the late ninth and early eighth centuries, the site seems to have maintained or revived an affiliation with Judah throughout the eighth century B.C.E. The recovery from subsequent levels of ink-written ostraca in eighth-century Hebrew, a "private" seal impression of the same period (and apparently of a royal official),[18] several LMLK seal impressions and multiple examples of LMLK-style jar handles, along with fragments of Assyrian Palace Ware and other typical eighth-century ceramic forms, lends support to this interpretation.

Local Level I

Representing a period of significant building activity at the site, Local Level I emerged first in the western half of Square O20 and revealed a series of walls and associated floor levels that extended into N20. The entire structure had suffered heavy destruction, with the resultant debris taking the form of heavily burnt, rubbly brick detritus mixed with black and light gray ash, which spread across the entire eastern half of N20 and the western half of O20 (an area of ca. 100 m^2). The principal architectural features in this square included a small room[19] with two storage bins on its north side (fig. 5:2514, 2515, 2529). These bins also contained the detritus of red-fired bricks, ash, and smashed pottery vessels, and at least the westernmost bin was constructed after the blockage of an earlier doorway in the northwest corner of the room. Thick deposits of destruction debris (up to .73 m) smothered all the floors in the area, including the principal surface inside Room 2529, and yielded numerous restorable vessels and a large deposit of carbonized grain. Radiocarbon testing of this material (as well as of grain, seeds, olive pits, and charcoal collected from other deposits in O20) at two independent laboratories suggests a date for the destruction of this level sometime in the late ninth century, probably during its last quarter.[20] The combined radiocarbon test results appear in table 4.

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[14] Singer-Avitz 2002: 113, 118, fig. 4:9 (Stratum XI; Singer-Avitz also includes the less apt parallel in her fig. 7:10; contrast these jars with those from Stratum X in her figs. 16–18). For a revised chronology of the Arad stratigraphy, see Herzog 2002; for a summary of strata, see Herzog 2002: 14, table 1.

[15] A. Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 90, 98–99; SJ Type 7b.

[16] Gitin 1998: 170, fig. 4:12. Cf. A. Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: pl. 103:18(?) (Stratum III); pls. 34:8, 12; 43:2–7; 65:11; 72:5; 96:14; 104:11 (Stratum II); see also their discussion of Type CP 10 on pp. 86–87.

[17] With the examples from Tel Zayit, compare others from Stratum II at Beersheba (Y. Aharoni, ed. 1973: pls. 61:87–88; 66:11; 69:4; 71:15) and from Tell el-Ḥesi (Blakely and Hardin 2002: 38, fig. 15:3). Because the bottoms of the Tel Zayit pots did not survive, it remains uncertain whether these vessels followed the rounded forms at Tel Batash or the antecedent, more angular styles from Beersheba. Recently, on the basis of the prominence of this style of vessel among the cooking pots of Beersheba II, L. Singer-Avitz argued that the type actually originated locally at Beersheba and only later spread to the southern coastal region (Singer-Avitz 1999: 14–16, fig. 2:7). Note, however, that the clay used in the manufacturing of some of the Beersheba pots contained sand that likely came from the coastal plain area (see Singer-Avitz 1999: 20). The appearance of these pots at Tel Zayit suggests either that this style was not limited to Judaean sites in the Beersheba Valley (as per Singer-Avitz 2002: 140) or that Tel Zayit should be considered a coastal site by this time, not a Judaean one. (The presence at Tel Zayit of LMLK seal impressions, etc. [see n. 18 below] suggests the former option as the best interpretation.) In the seventh century, when the style is common in coastal assemblages, this cooking pot still appears at borderland sites such as Tel Masos (Zimhoni 1983: 127–30, pl. 165:10–13) and Tell Jemmeh Stratum E (Petrie 1928: pl. 52:32n; cf. also 32e).

[18] The inscription reads, "Belonging to Tanḥum (son of) Negeb [or perhaps 'from the Negev']." For parallels and bibliography, see Avigad 1997: 262, no. 708; Vaughn 1999: 216, no. 37; for other occurrences of the name Tanḥum, see Avigad 1986: 104, no. 168; Deutsch and Heltzer 1999: 81–85, fig. 160; Vaughn 1999: 199, 215–16; and *AHI*-2: 224. For the status of Tanḥum as an eighth-century official in Judah, see Vaughn 1999: 90–101, table 4:27.

[19] Walls 2505, 2508, and 2534 ranged from .35 to .70 m in their preserved widths, and the distance from Wall 144 on the north to Wall 2508 on the south measured 1.75 to 1.80 m.

[20] Individual samples were tested at the Weizman Institute of Science (WI) in Israel and at the Centre for Isotope Research at the University of Groningen (Gr) in the Netherlands. At the Weizman Institute, Ilan Sharon, Elisabetta Boaretto, and Ayelet Gilboa performed the work as part of a research project supported by the Israel Science Foundation of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities. J. van der Plicht completed the testing at the University of Groningen.

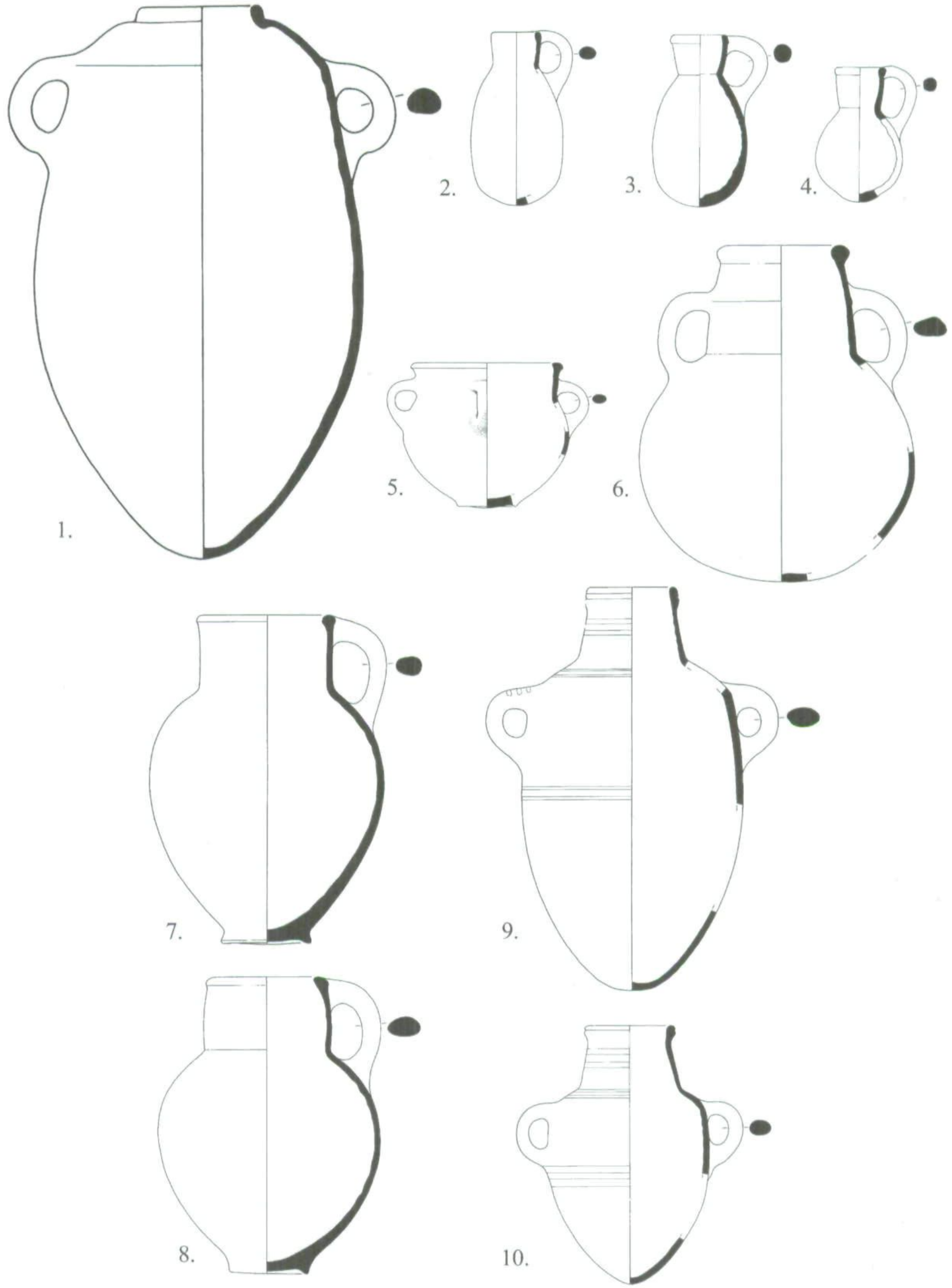

Fig. 3. Pottery from Tel Zayit. Scale 1:5. See table 2 for descriptions.

TABLE 2. Pottery from Tel Zayit Illustrated in Figure 3

Description	*Reg. No.*	*Provenance*	*Preliminary Stratum*
1. Amphora	No. 927	T.7.N20.141	Subphase 1a
2. Juglet	No. 914	T.7.O20.1477	Local Level I
3. Juglet	No. 562	T.7.O20.1406	Local Level I
4. Juglet	No. 561	T.7.O20.1406	Local Level I
5. Krater, small	No. 903	T.7.O20.1476	Local Level I
6. Jar, 2-handled	No. 909	T.7.O20.1476	Local Level I
7. Jug, 1-handled	No. 906	T.7.O20.1476	Local Level I
8. Jug, 1-handled	No. 907	T.7.O20.1477	Local Level I
9. Ashdod Ware Jar, large	No. 908	T.7.O20.1476	Local Level I
10. Ashdod Ware Jar, small	No. 911	T.7.O20.1476	Local Level I

The eighth-century deposits in Square O20, located on the declining shoulder of the mound, have largely eroded down the steep eastern slope of the site.[21] The uppermost layer of ninth-century destruction debris (1406), however, immediately yielded an assemblage of restorable vessels ensconced in a matrix similar to that witnessed in N20. The preserved wall foundations allowed for the identification in this area of a number of rooms, which incorporated two pottery-laden storage pits or cellars (fig. 6). The surfaces surrounding these features lapped over the rim of each pit, and debris from the destruction of the associated walls covered the tops of the pits. These facts establish that the pits were contemporary with the floors and the building and that they functioned together with them. Because they were so well sealed, these two findspots constitute primary loci in this portion of the late ninth-century structure. One of these areas (1476), a round pit that lay in a kind of niche at the northwestern corner of the main room, yielded a cache of vessels that again displays a mix of inland and coastal forms. The straight-sided bowl with two handles, smaller bowl with red-to-orangish slip and chordal-horizontal hand burnishing (fig. 4:5–7), various juglet forms (fig. 3:2–4), and a small four-handled krater with numerous large calcite grits (fig. 3:5) all fit in an inland ceramic assemblage and actually reflect many attributes that descended from tenth-century-B.C.E. industries. In addition, the globular jar with a wide throat, two handles from the central neck ridge to the shoulder area, a rounded bulbous rim, and coarse vertical burnishing (fig. 3:6) also appears, in our judgment, to represent as much an inland as a coastal type and to preserve traits carried forward from the tenth century.[22] These same contexts, however, yielded a nuanced series of one-handled jugs[23] and two well-preserved examples of Ashdod Ware (fig. 3:7–8, 9–10) that reflect a clear increase in coastal connections, though analysis of the clay of the Ashdod Ware revealed an origin in the Shephelah region.[24] The fact that certain key coastal forms (such as the coastal cooking pot of Subphase

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[21] The only possible remains from the eighth century in this area consist in a series of very closely laid resurfacings (Loci 1450, 1459, 1465, 1471, 1492, 1493) that survived in the southwestern corner of the square (i.e., adjacent to the southeastern corner of N20). None of these layers was preserved to any appreciable lateral extent, and their precise stratigraphic relationship to other features in O20 and N20 remains unclear.

[22] See a similar example, though with a narrower neck and a variant base form, from Iron I levels at Beth-Shemesh in Amiran 1969: 233, photo 240. Excavators at Tell eṣ-Ṣâfi include this form in their so-called Late Philistine Decorated Ware group, a proposed new name for the former "Ashdod Ware" (Ben-Shlomo, Shai, and Maeir 2004). It remains unclear whether this form represents a true Philistine tradition. Others have suggested a relationship between this jar type and the later urns and jars used in cremation burials at Ruqeish, but this association also remains, in our judgment, uncertain. With the two bowls presented in fig. 4:5–6, cf. similar traditions at Lachish in Zimhoni 1997: figs. 3.16:6 and 3.21:9, 15 (Level V–early IV).

[23] These jugs find close parallels in Type JG-11 at Tel Batash. (See A. Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 110–12, for a full discussion and comparative evidence from Ashdod Strata X–VII and Tel Batash Strata IV–II.) They represent a coastal tradition that appeared in the tenth and ninth centuries B.C.E., experienced a floruit in the eighth century, and remained a common form in the seventh century (though with noticeable nuances in both body and rim styles). For parallels from Tell eṣ-Ṣâfi, see Shai and Maeir 2003: 110, 112, fig. 2.

[24] The composition of the Tel Zayit Ashdod Ware showed "a calcareous clay with sandy chalk and limestone inclusions and silty quartz inclusions. This fits soils from the southern Shephelah region; it does not come from the coast" (personal communication from D. Ben-Shlomo on March 14, 2005).

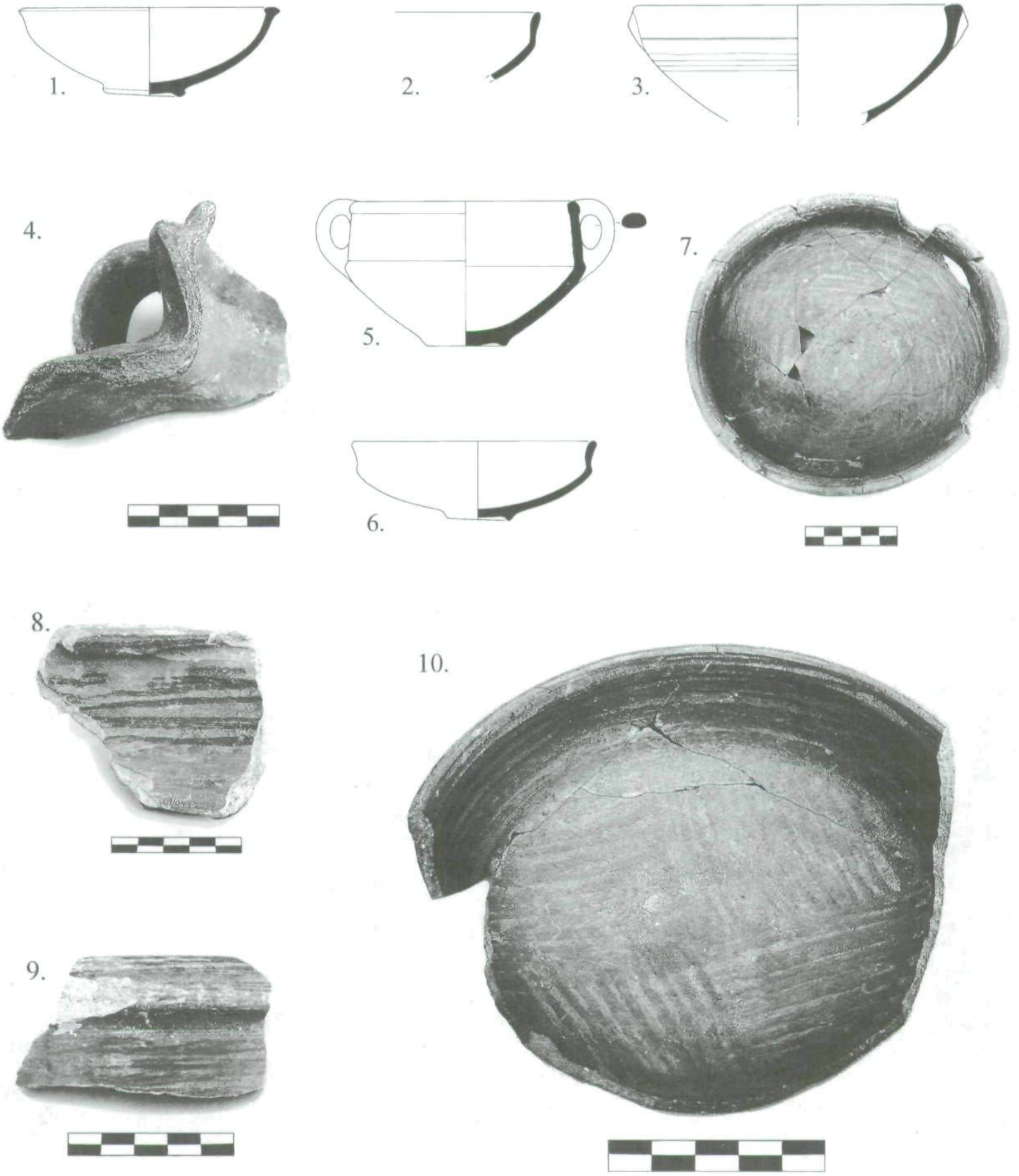

Fig. 4. Pottery from Tel Zayit. Scale of drawings 1:5. See table 3 for descriptions.

1a, the rounded rice bowl with incised lines, coastal kraters, holemouth jars, chalices and stands, etc.) remain absent from this assemblage bears further witness to the generally mixed nature of the traditions attested in this level. The overall assemblage, then, is not exclusively inland or coastal in this period; rather, it shows connections in both directions. The second pit (1477) and contemporary deposits in N20 produced more than 20 whole or partial clay fermentation stoppers ranging in weight between 250 and

TABLE 3. Pottery from Tel Zayit Illustrated in Figure 4

Description	*Reg. No.*	*Provenance*	*Preliminary Stratum*
1. Bowl, rounded, low ring base	No. 901	T.7.O20.1477	Local Level I
2. Bowl, carinated	No. 2035	T.7.O20.1527	Local Level II
3. Bowl, rounded	No. 1020	T.7.O20.1529	Local Level II
4. Cooking pot	—	T.7.O19.2239	Subphase 1a
5. Bowl, 2 handles	—	T.7.O20.1406	Local Level I
6. Bowl, carination	No. 905	T.7.O20.1476	Local Level I
7. Interior chordal burnishing on no. 6	No. 905	T.7.O20.1476	Local Level I
8. Krater, nailhead rim, dark red slip	No. 2038	T.7.O19.2305	Local Level III
9. Krater, inward-rolled rim, dark red slip	No. 2039	A.7.O19.2306	Local Level III
10. Bowl, interior pattern burnishing	No. 2511	T.7.O19.2382	Local Level III

640 g each and similar in design to those found at other sites in Israel starting as early as the late tenth century B.C.E. [25]

Judging from a preliminary examination of the pottery recovered from the principal findspots in the rooms described above, and from the similarity of the overall assemblage to the late ninth-century repertoire from a contemporaneous destruction level at Tell eṣ-Ṣâfi (Philistine Gath; see Maeir 2001), it appears that the destruction of Local Level I occurred sometime during the late ninth century B.C.E. Though many questions surround the identity of the perpetrator, the event may have constituted part of a broader drive through this region by Hazael (2 Kgs 12:17–18)[26] following the relaxation of Assyrian pressure against Damascus from the mid-830s on.[27] The laconic biblical reference in 2 Kings to this Aramaean campaign alludes to the deepest penetration by Damascus into Judah and Philistia and the only international event recorded for the reign of Jehoash of Judah.[28]

Subphases 2a–2b

Lying beneath the subfloor fills for Local Level I, two stratigraphically distinct cobblestone pavements appeared in both O20 and O19. These pavings seem to have covered a localized, rather narrow portion of the building, since they did not clearly fit into a wider stratigraphic context (which at that level showed a uniform brown fill across the general area). These features likely served as the final two phases in a series of floor levels connecting to walls in Local Level II. The stones of the upper pavement showed a general diameter of 15–20 cm and included several grinding stones, a mortar, and a pestle. The earlier level lay only a couple of centimeters below this pavement and connected to a wall that was cut by the later construction of Local Level I. A thick deposit of compact, brown, bricky fill lay beneath this pavement, and excavators removed the bottommost portion of the fill separately in order to take flotation samples from the floor level beneath it (which belongs to Local Level II and represents the earliest living surface reached in O20).

It remains uncertain whether the principal cultural influence during these mid-ninth-century phases came from inland or coastal areas, since these pavings survived only in limited swatches scattered over O20 and O19 and since the associated ceramic repertoire is not extensive enough to allow firm conclusions on this matter. In general, the preserved fragments resemble those from Local Level II, though the short-necked coastal amphora (see above) already appears

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[25] See Homan 2004: 89–91. Compare the tenth-century examples from Ḥorvat Rosh Zayit and Tell el-Ḥammeh (Gal 1989: 281–83; Cahill, Tarler, and Lipowitz 1989: 36–37) with later ones from Ashkelon (see Weiss and Kislev 2004: 36). See also the comments regarding stoppers from Lachish Level III in Ussishkin 2004: Vol. 4, 1791.

[26] Though B. Mazar (1954) understood the "Gath" in these verses to refer to Gittaim, located near modern Ramleh in the northern Shephelah, A. F. Rainey (1975) later suggested that it denotes Gath of the Philistines, generally thought to lie farther south at the site of Tell eṣ-Ṣâfi.

[27] For a summary of the campaigns against Syria and the West by Shalmaneser III between 853 and 834 B.C.E., see Tappy 2001: 507–16.

[28] Cogan and Tadmor 1988: 141. The Tel Dan Inscription might easily relate to this same episode. Though it is impossible to tell at what point in the campaign this text was inscribed in stone, one wonders whether the lost portion of the stela might have mentioned Hazael's activities in the Shephelah.

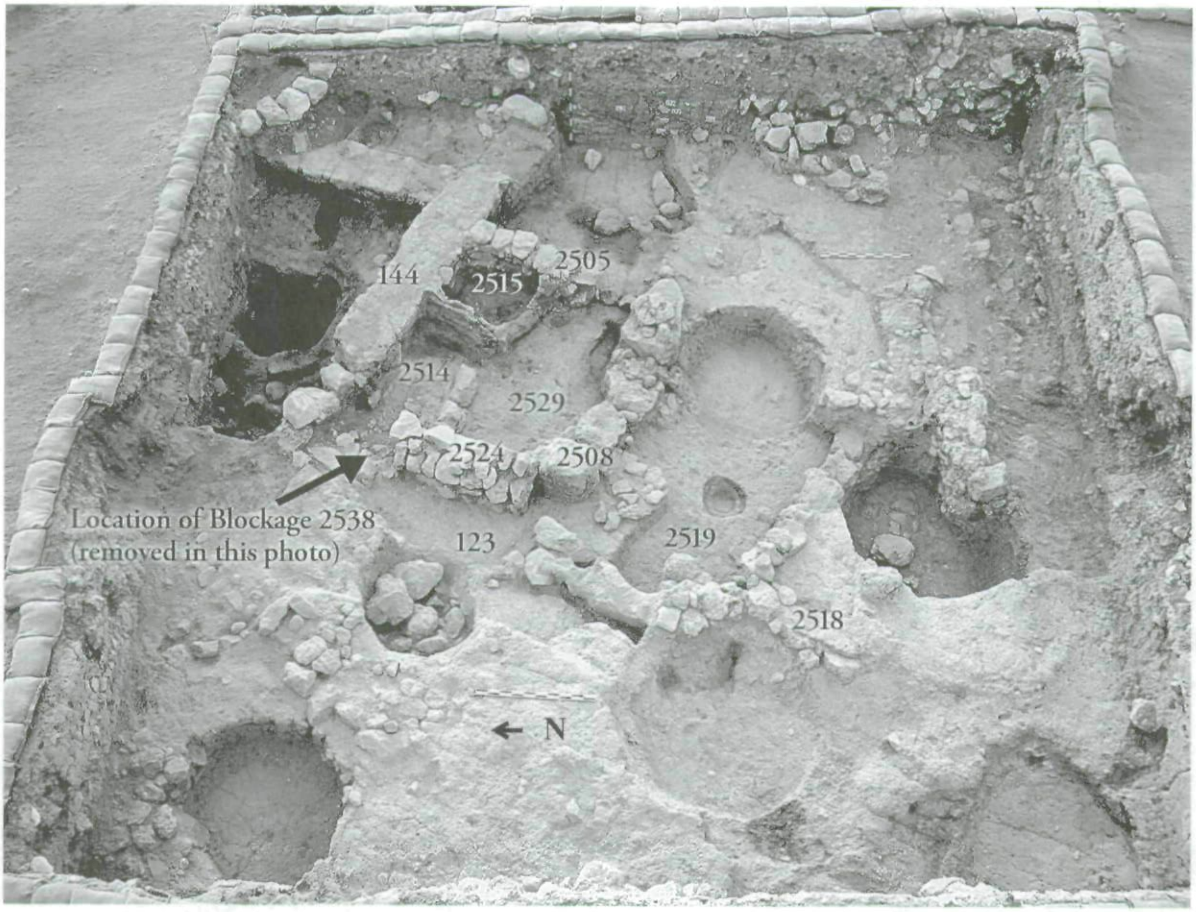

Fig. 5. Square N20: Overview of principal loci.

alongside storage jars with high necks, plain or bulbous rims, and drooping shoulders (resembling Zimhoni's SJ-1 class, which is heavily attested in Lachish V–IV but which disappears by Level III; see Zimhoni 1997: 131, fig. 3.46).[29]

Local Level II

A group of contemporaneous beaten-earth surfaces (fig. 7:1540–1544), which appeared across Square O20 and which lay .27–.43 m below the paving of Subphase 2b and .50–.66 m below the floors of Local Level I, belongs in the early ninth century B.C.E. Though the floors themselves have not yet been removed, the deposits lying directly on them (1523, 1527, 1529, 1551, 1553, 1554) yielded a collection of 1,240 identifiable ceramic fragments, which appear from preliminary readings to date almost exclusively (98.87%) to the early Iron II period. The final typological and statistical analyses for this assemblage await completion, and an appreciable percentage of the collection reflects at best quasi-diagnostic body fragments from different though related styles of jugs and jars.[30] Still, the bowls from these levels include various traditions that hold some chronological value. For example, small- to medium-sized red-slipped and hand-burnished bowls, with carination on the upper portion of their sidewalls and with

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[29] Zimhoni's 1997 study reappears in the official excavation report from Lachish, but with the pottery plates arranged by loci rather than by ceramic groups (see Ussishkin 2004: Vol. 4, 1643, n. 1).

[30] For example, these deposits yielded specimens comparable to Tufnell's Class S.1 and Zimhoni's Group SJ-5 at Lachish, i.e., storage jars with hard firing plus short, vertical necks, vertical and rounded or thickened rims, and drooping shoulders (cf. Tufnell 1953: 312–13, pl. 94:468; Zimhoni 1997: 135, fig. 3.49:6, from Level IV, though the greatest number of these jars appeared in Level V).

TABLE 4. Combined Results of Radiocarbon Testing of Materials from Tel Zayit

Ref. No.	*Sample Type*	*Collection Site*	*^{14}C Age BP*	*^{14}C Age Average*	*Calibrated Date B.C.E. (% of probability)*
Gr #1	Grain	A.7.N20.2503.97	2750 ± 20	2750 ± 20	1σ 910–895 875–840
Gr #2	Grain	T.7.O20.1476.148	AMS 2730 ± 40	2730 ± 40	1σ 905–835
WI 4279.4 WI 4279.5	Charcoal	T.7.O20.1476.148	2680 ± 40 2683 ± 40	2682 ± 28	1σ 895–875 (12.3%) 840–800 (55.9%) 2σ 900–800 (95.4%)
WI 4280.3 WI 4280.4	Charcoal	T.7.O20.1476.103	2615 ± 45 2653 ± 40	2636 ± 30	1σ 822–798 (68.2%) 2σ 900–880 (2%) 840–780 (93.3%)
WI 4275-1.3 WI 4275-1.4 WI 4275-1.5	Seeds	T.7.O20.1477.94	2639 ± 40 2646 ± 45 2745 ± 56	2665 ± 26	1σ 835–800 (68.2%) 2σ 895–865 (9.6%) 860–855 (1.1%) 850–795 (1.1%)
WI 4275-2.3	Olive pits	T.7.O20.1477.94	2616 ± 40	2616 ± 40	1σ 809–775 (68.2%) 2σ 900–750 (90.7%) 690–660 (3.6%) 620–590 (1.1%)
WI 4275-3.3 WI 4275-3.4 WI 4275-3.5	Charcoal	T.7.O20.1477.94	2573 ± 40 2605 ± 40 2598 ± 40	2592 ± 23	1σ 805–780 (68.2%) 2σ 810–760 (95.4%)

a slight concavity between rim and carination, represent a typical class in this level (fig. 4:2). This style most closely parallels Zimhoni's Type B-16 from Level V at Lachish, examples of which usually appear with coarse, hand burnishing (Zimhoni 1997: 96–97, fig. 3.21:9, 11; cf. Tufnell's [1953] Class B.5: Types 42–43, 55). The prevalence of this form waned during the period represented by Level IV at Lachish, when the wall above the carination flared out to a greater degree (cf. Zimhoni 1997: fig. 3.21:15–24). By Lachish III, the point of carination fell to the lower half of the bowl and also became more rounded (Zimhoni 1997: 96). In addition to this style, rounded bowls with thickened, flattened, and slightly inverted rims also appear at both Tel Zayit (fig. 4:3) and Lachish (cf. Zimhoni 1997: fig. 3.11:1, from Lachish Level V), with the red slip extending over the rim and just below the vestigial handles and a combination of irregular and horizontal hand burnishing appearing on the interior and upper, exterior portions of the vessels. Such traits reflect, in our judgment, not only probable chronological markers but also attributes that moved from inland (Judahite/Israelite) sites to the coastal area, not vice versa. At Lachish, for example, the percentage of bowls displaying this slip-and-burnishing pattern remained high and relatively constant in Levels V–IV;[31] and at Taʿanach in the north, Rast (1978: 31, 45) described this style as a "marked characteristic" limited to Period IIB (tenth century). At Tel Batash, however, this slip-and-burnish type was not prominent among any of the bowl or krater assemblages, though its numbers increased slightly in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C.E. (A. Mazar and Panitz-Cohen 2001: 151–52, table 21). Moreover, the

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[31] Zimhoni 1997: 116–19, fig. 3.36. Bowls showing a similar surface treatment but belonging to Local Level I at Tel Zayit parallel more closely Zimhoni's Class B-9 (cf. fig. 4:1 above with Zimhoni 1997: 85, figs. 3.13; 3.14).

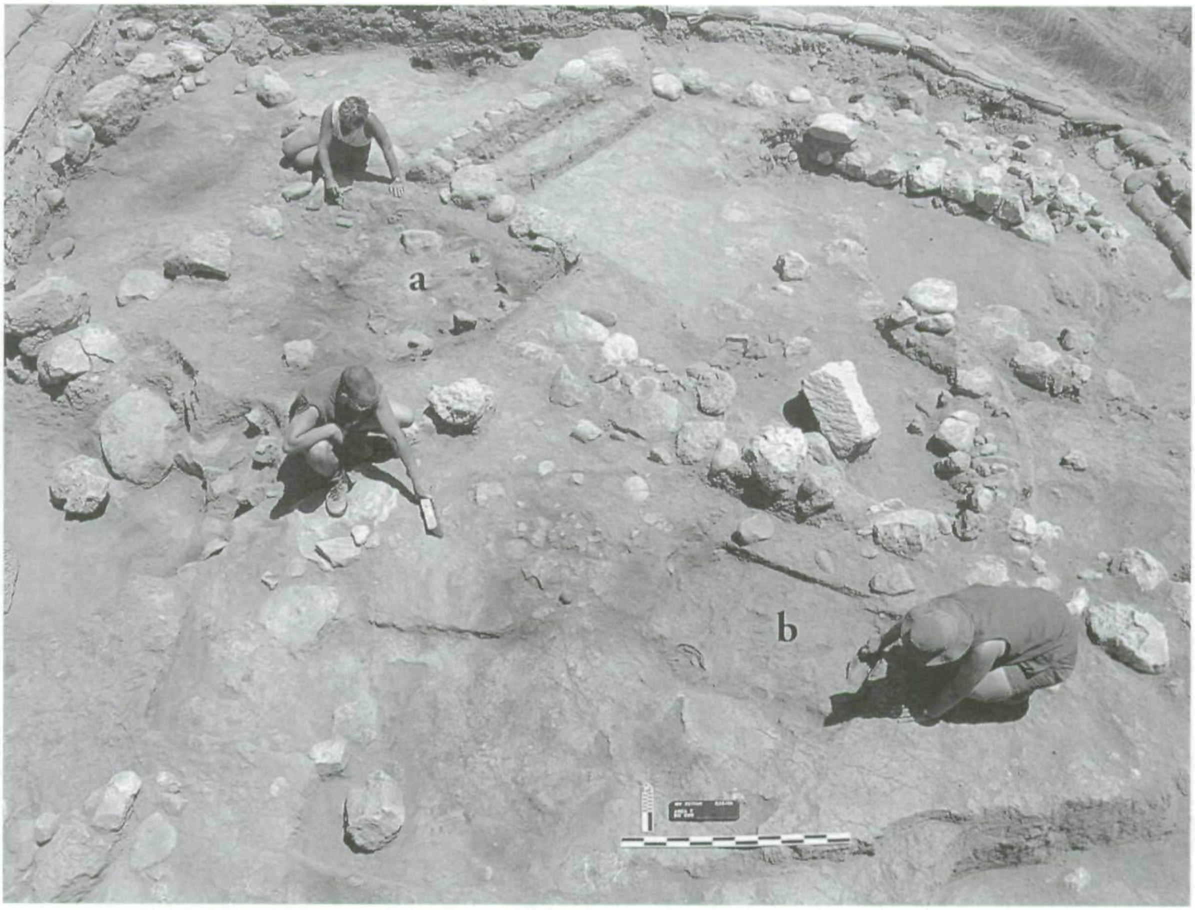

Fig. 6. Square O20: Late ninth-century floors; storage pits (a) 1476/1485 and (b) 1477/1486.

clear but somewhat limited number of coastal traditions attested in the late ninth-century B.C.E. Local Level I do not appear in these early ninth-century deposits, even though some traditions (such as the Ashdod Ware) might easily have done so had Tel Zayit already established strong ties to the coast during this period. Especially important in this regard is the apparent absence of one-handled jugs (see again fig. 3:7–8), the principal coastal form attested in Level I.

Local Level III (the Provenance of the Tel Zayit Abecedary)

By the conclusion of the 2001 season at Tel Zayit, preliminary work in Square O19 had revealed several significant features situated below an accumulation of closely spaced ashy surfaces (fig. 8A). In the southeastern quadrant of the square, the clear outline of what would later emerge as a large granary was visible (a). A noticeable fault line (b)—probably the result of an earthquake in the early eighth century B.C.E.[32]—ran across the square just west of the granary, and the head of a tall, outcropping monolith (c) emerged to the northeast of this area. When the tops of badly burnt, disarticulated mudbricks appeared in the soil layers around this monolith (d), excavators began cutting a deep probe across the area to assess the nature and stratigraphic relationships of this deposit. In subsequent seasons, we removed the later surfaces, emptied the granary, and exposed an impressive structure running through the probe to the northeast (fig. 8B).

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[32] At nearby Lachish, the excavators concluded that severe tectonic activity in the region brought Level IVa to a close around 760 B.C.E. (see Ussishkin 2004: Vol. 1, 83). From the point of view of stratigraphic analysis, the fault and affected layers at Tel Zayit correlate well with this event and dating. For more details on the geological, archaeological, literary, and historical impact of this earthquake, see Dever 1992; Austin, Franz, and Frost 2000.

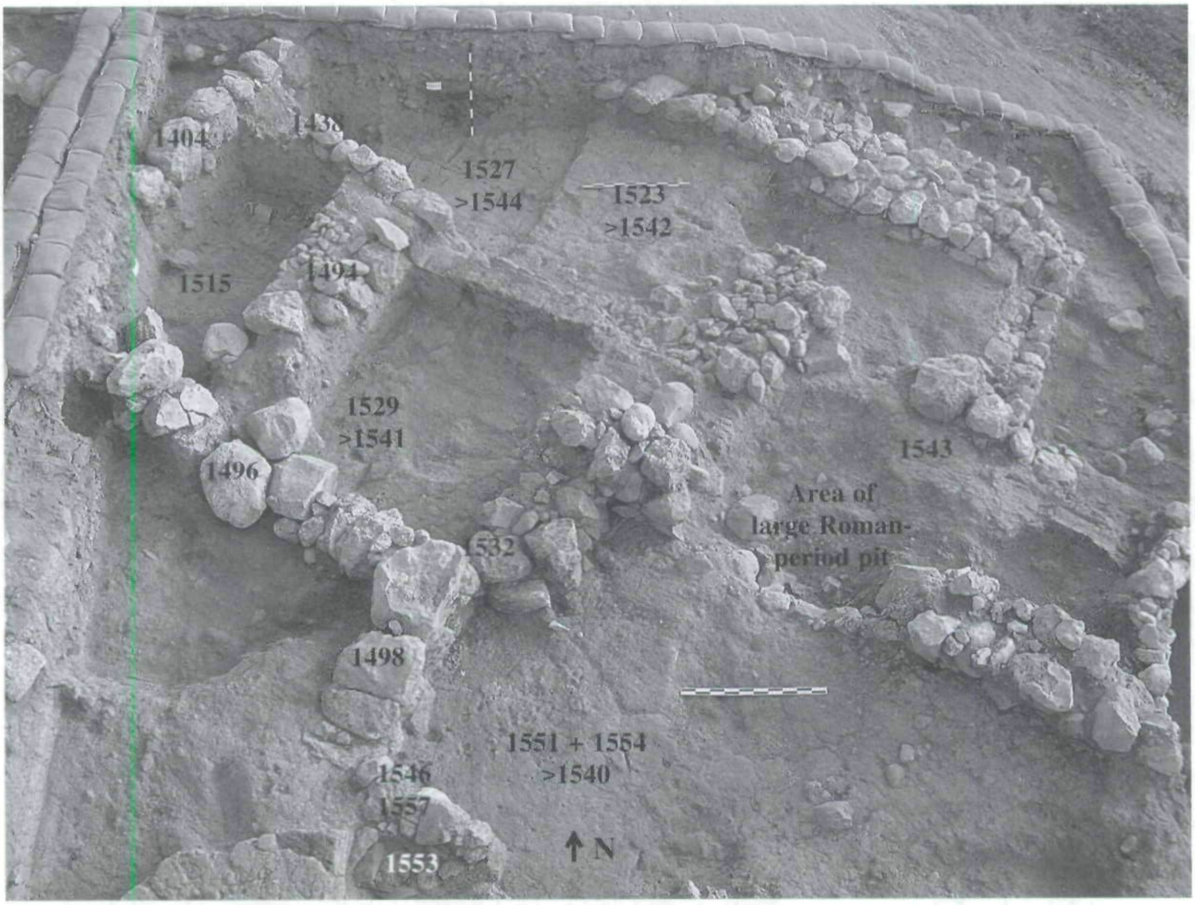

Fig. 7. Square O20: Local Level II—Early ninth-century B.C.E. floor levels.

Work in the area of the probe immediately encountered several striations of dark, ashy material interspersed with thicker accumulations of burnt, bricky detritus. This material ran beneath a cobblestone paving associated with Subphase 2a and above the principal architectural features of the tenth-century Iron IIA stratum, which itself lay a full 1.24 m below Local Level I in N20 and .74 m below Local Level II in O20. Though the break in soil layers caused by the early eighth-century seismic activity disrupted these ashy deposits and the western wall of the granary, the architecture of Level III displayed no apparent damage from this event.

The tenth-century structure did, however, suffer a massive destruction by fire, perhaps at the hands of Shishak, Zeraḥ the Ethiopian (who may have acted as an agent of Shishak), or someone else; the historical background to this destruction remains uncertain.[33] In any event, a .75-m-thick accumulation of heavily burnt debris smothered the structure's principal components (fig. 9), shown thus far to include two parallel, stone-built walls (2307/2389 and 2314) joined by a well-built flagstone floor (2317), and a crosswall that defines the southwestern edge both of this room (2371) and of at least one more chamber to the east (Surface 2378). The walls are preserved to a height of approximately 1.10 m and a width of .55–.70 m, and the 2.10-m-wide floor is paved with large-sized flagstones. Wall 2314 incorporates a huge

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[33] Unfortunately, the Bible preserves only a mention of Shishak's campaign (1 Kgs 14:25–28; 2 Chr 12:1–12), though the latter passage notes that some fortified cities of Judah did, in fact, fall during this invasion. (For a literary and historical assessment of 2 Chr 12, see Japhet 1993: 673–84.) Further, the portion of Shishak's (Shoshenq I's) topographical list that apparently deals with the cities of the southern coastal plain and western frontier of the Judaean Shephelah is very poorly preserved. According to 2 Chr 14:8–14, Asa of Judah defeated Zeraḥ the Ethiopian at Mareshah and then pursued him as far as Gerar. Otherwise, Zeraḥ remains an unknown figure in extant historical records.

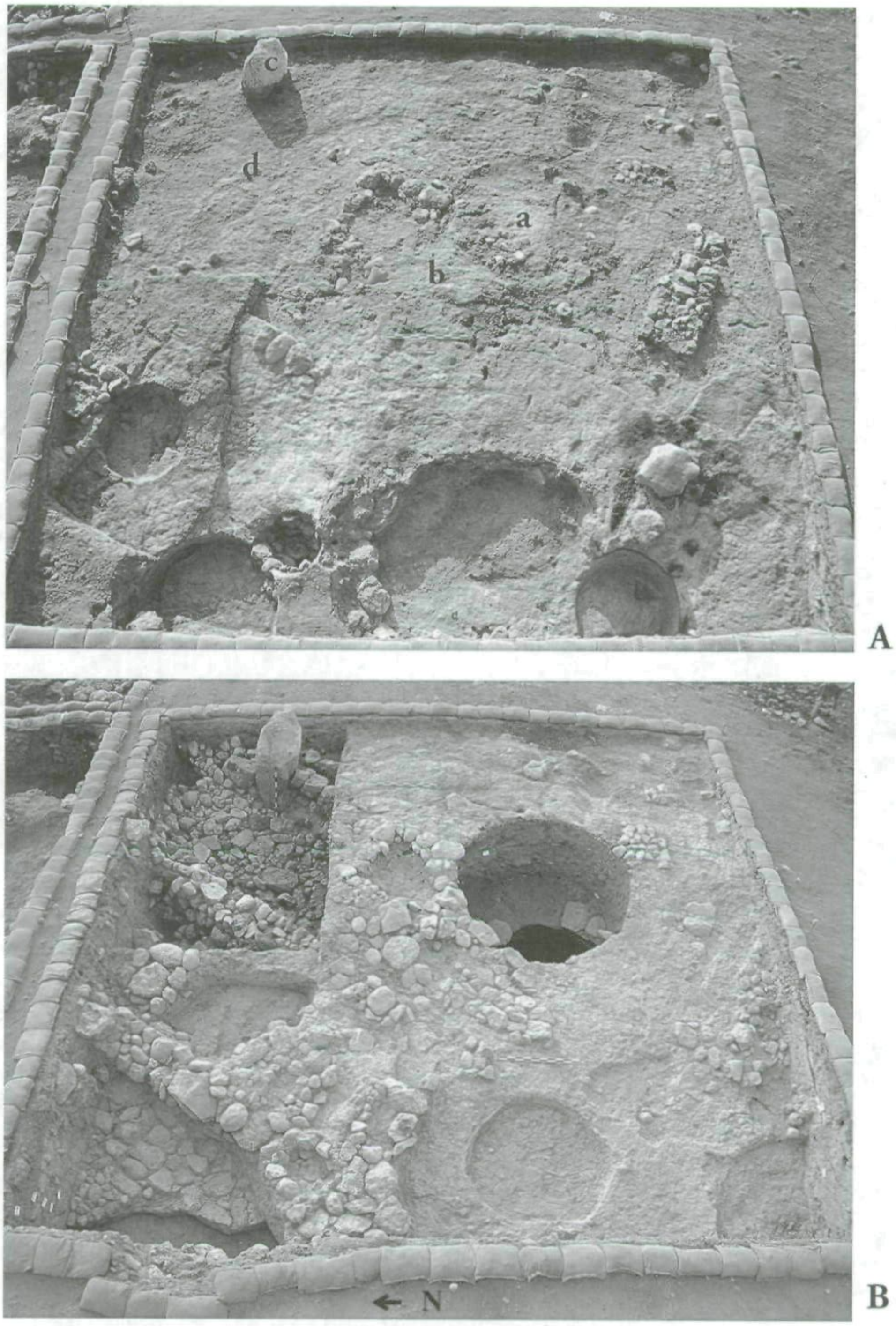

Fig. 8. Square O19: Aerial views.

monolith (1.60 m of exposed height to date; 2.25 m in circumference), which undoubtedly relates to a much larger architectural design that includes at least nine other such elements, whose exposed tops encircle almost the entire mound at an elevation of 172 m (fig. 9). Several additional large stones appeared in the granary; judging from their relative elevations and size, they seem to represent further remnants of the monolith wall and possibly even the flagstone paving. A limited probe (2 m × 2.5 m) near the south-

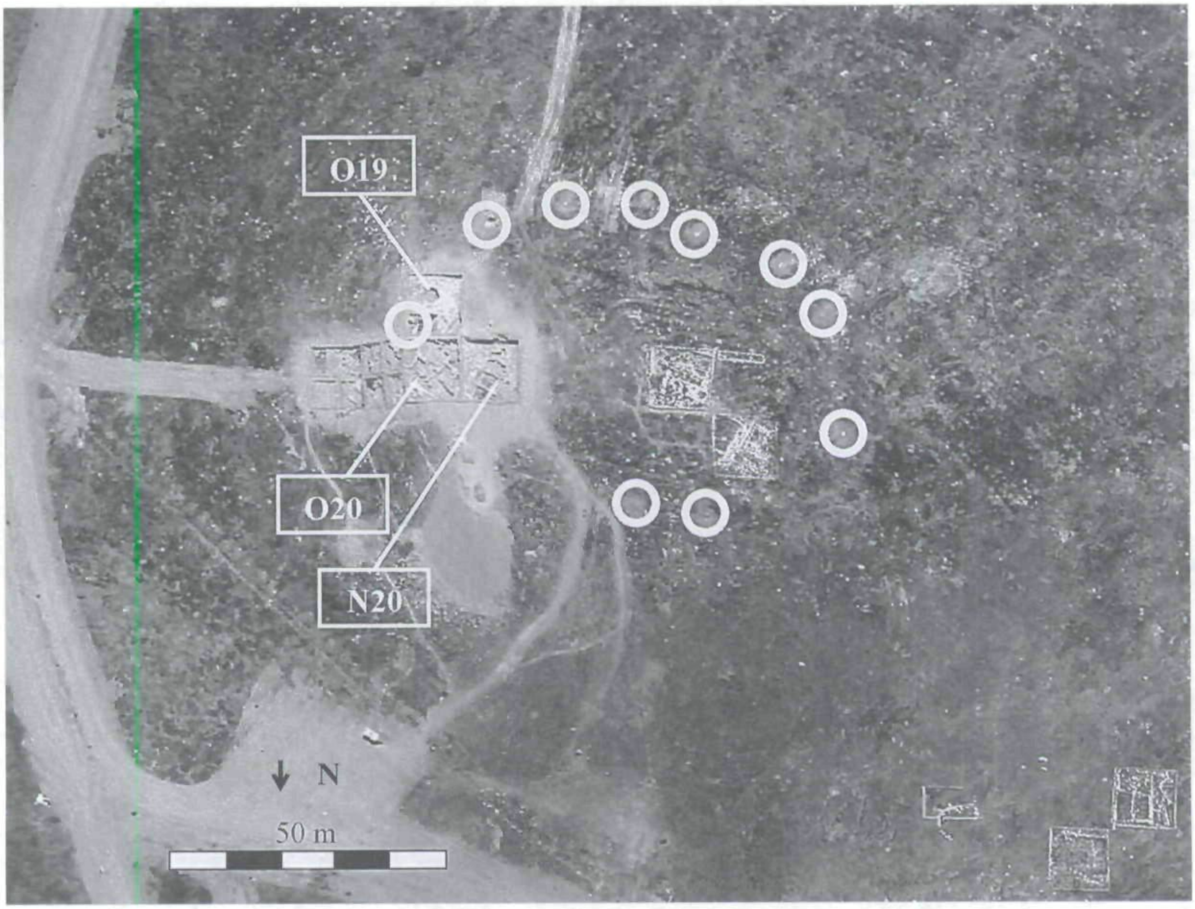

Fig. 9. Aerial view of site (after burning) showing locations of outcropping monoliths around the summit.

eastern corner of Square N18 exposed part of another upright monolith, as well as a swatch of paving to its north.

These discoveries led to the preliminary conclusion that the related features formed a defensive corridor extending around the shoulder of the entire summit. Further clearance, however, revealed a crosswall (2371) that connected the two parallel walls and thereby partitioned off a chamber northeast of 2371 (fig. 10). Rather than constituting an uninterrupted corridor, then, the larger structure seems to have involved a series of well-built rooms that encircled the mound. Near Crosswall 2371, a doorway in the monolith wall at the southeastern corner of the flagstone chamber led eastward to another room with a hard, beaten-earth surface (2378). This design clearly suggests that the additional chambers projected as lying between the monoliths encircling the mound constituted part of a larger, multiroom structure. It seems very likely, then, that a belt of houses or small buildings enclosed the upper part of the Iron Age IIA town at Tel Zayit in a manner perhaps comparable to the Stratum XII enclosure at Arad, now dated to the pre-fortress period in the second half of the tenth century B.C.E.[34] Accordingly, our Wall 2307/2389—the feature that incorporated the Tel Zayit Abecedary (circled in fig. 10)—constitutes the outer, westernmost wall of a structure that extended to the east. Considered together, the flagstone paving inside the western chamber and the beaten-earth surface in the adjoining room may indicate that a ring of pillared houses lined the shoulder of the site. Since the wall that included the monolith was preserved to a relatively short height (rising only .45 m above the gray mud plaster covering the flagstones to its west), it may have

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[34] See Herzog 2002: 18–21, fig. 7; also 86–89 for the view that, during the tenth century B.C.E., such "enclosed settlements" reflect the final stage in a transition from pastoral-nomadic to semisedentary to sedentary lifestyles. Cf. also Herzog 2001: 172–73.

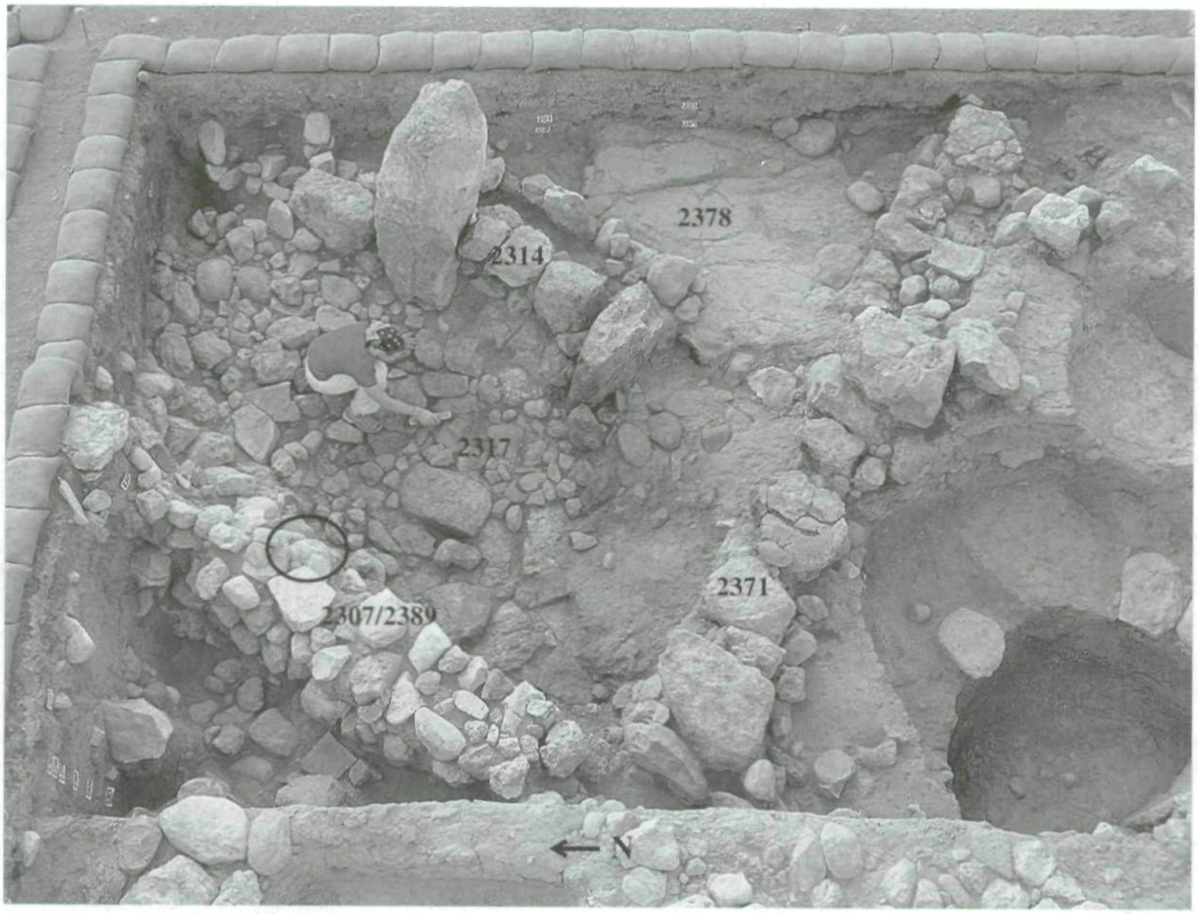

Fig. 10. Square O19: Tenth-century B.C.E. structure (circle indicates location of the Tel Zayit abecedary in Wall 2307/2389).

functioned as a stylobate that either supported or incorporated a trough, not as a principal load-bearing wall.[35] At this point, however, the situation requires further excavation to explore the full design of the structure and to clarify its original function.

During the conflagration, a large segment of the first-floor ceiling and second-story floor (fig. 11:2318), laid directly on top of the ceiling material, collapsed, fell straight down into the western chamber, and landed on the flagstone pavement of the room below. The ceiling makeup shows multiple resurfacings, alternating between red-fired clay and grayish colored ash, that had apparently been rolled flat with a round, stone roof-roller. Near the western edge of this collapse, there appeared a rounded, blackened area that likely represents a burned-out beam used in the construction of the ceiling and upper floor levels. A portion of this beam also fell across the beaten-earth floor of the adjoining room. The tumble of large fragments of heavily burnt mudbricks, reaching a depth of nearly .75 m, covered the entire chamber. Surprisingly, this debris yielded only a meager ceramic assemblage, but its fragments of bowls, juglets, and thick-walled kraters typically display a dark red slip (much darker than that witnessed in the subsequent Local Level II) and coarsely spaced, irregular and discontinuous hand burnishing (e.g., fig. 4:8–9; at Tel Zayit, then, the technique of hand burnishing occurs in Local Level III and for several succeeding phases and subphases). The best-preserved bowl from this period shows a combination of discontinuous horizontal hand burnishing running parallel to the rim around the interior and exterior (to the point of carination) of a straight upper sidewall, plus a basket-

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[35] For descriptions of these house features, see Stager 1985: 1–35, esp. 11–17, and more recently King and Stager 2001: 28–35.

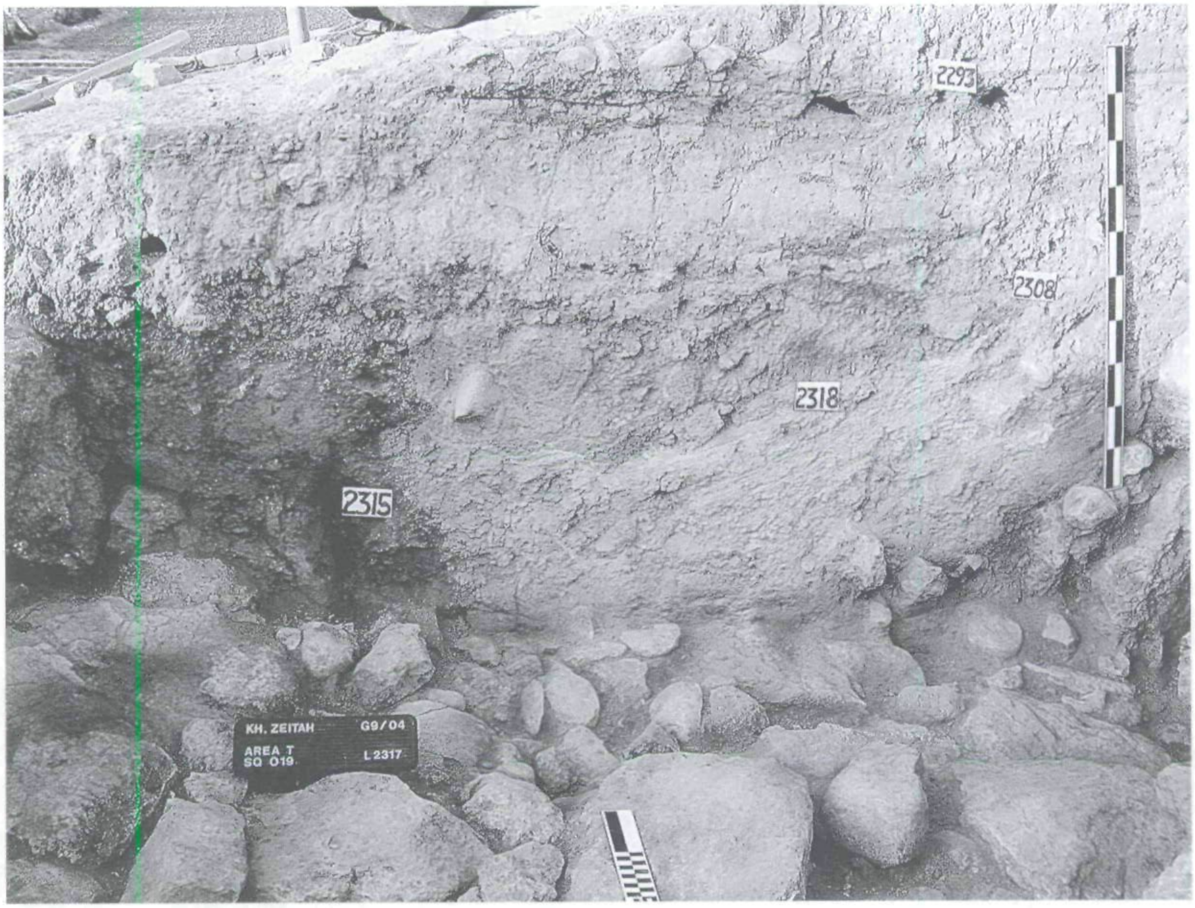

Fig. 11. Square O19: South section of probe showing collapsed roof, beam, and bricks.

weave pattern of irregular burnishing across the interior base and perpendicular to the rim (fig. 4:10). Similar forms with pattern burnishing are well attested in Lachish Levels V–IV, from the late tenth through the ninth centuries B.C.E.[36]

The flagstones, which showed a high-luster polish from long-term wear, continued through the extreme southeastern corner of Square O20 and into the southwestern corner of Square P20 (at the top of the eastern slope). In addition, Walls 2307/2389 and 2314 both extended into P20 for distances between 2.2 m and 2.8 m before being cut off by later robbing and construction activities and subsequent heavy erosion. These correlations between the various parts of the system preserved in O18, O19, O20, and P20 prove extremely important, since they provide a direct stratigraphic connection between the Iron IIA remains on the eastern shoulder of the mound and depositional levels from the Late Bronze Age in the step trench of Area T, on the steep eastern slope of the tell. No occupational levels have emerged that could date to the interim between these two periods.[37] Thus it seems clear that an extended hiatus in the settlement history of Tel Zayit occurred during the Iron Age I period. This depositional history matches closely that of Levels VI–V at nearby Lachish and suggests a similar pattern of cultural evolution for the two cities at least through the tenth century B.C.E.

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[36] See Zimhoni 1997: 88–97, 115–16, and figs. 3.15:5; 3.16:4; 3.17:13; 3.21:1, 7, 11, 15, 23. At Lachish, 92 percent of the bowls display both slip and burnishing (vs. slip only) in Level V; by Level IV, the quantity reduces to 80 percent (p. 116, fig. 3.35). When a clear pattern is present in the burnishing, one may still consider the style to be "irregular hand burnishing," though the misleading rubrics "wild" or "careless" burnishing (see Rice 1987: 138–39) should be avoided (even when the burnished pattern is incomplete).

[37] Clearly, no Philistine occupation of the site has emerged from any of the areas excavated to date. Moreover, out of 212,138 fragments of pottery recovered thus far, only 24 examples of Philistine bichrome have appeared, and these from mostly scattered, unrelated findspots.

The builders of the tenth-century structure at Tel Zayit incorporated the stone bearing the abecedary into the eastern face of Wall 2307/2389, whose exposed dimensions in Square O19 measure .45 m in width, 1.15 m in height, and 4.85 m in length (see fig. 10). They constructed this wall with unworked fieldstones of varying shapes and sizes stacked in an irregular series of roughly six layers, but not true courses. The inscribed stone rested in the fifth layer at a height of .80 m above the flagstone floor and approximately .35 m below the top of the preserved portion of the stone wall. The relatively flat top of Wall 2307/2389 originally supported additional courses made of mudbricks, which, along with the ceiling and second-story floor, collapsed into and filled the paved chamber. This destruction debris yielded many well-preserved bricks, dozens of large brick fragments, and a great quantity of mudbrick detritus. From Crosswall 2371 to the north balk in Square O19, the flagstone paving ran a distance of 4.75 m, and the inscribed stone was situated approximately 2.4 m northeast of the corner formed by Walls 2307/2389 and 2371. Layers associated with Local Level II and extending across most of the northeastern quadrant of Square O19 (such as Surface 2293) covered and sealed the surviving architecture and conflagration of the late tenth-century B.C.E. Local Level III. Only the very top of the tall monolith in Wall 2314 remained visible above the modern surface, an exposure that resulted primarily from heavy erosion along the eastern shoulder of the mound.

PRELIMINARY SUMMARY FROM THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The limestone boulder bearing the Tel Zayit Abecedary emerged as part of an architectural structure that suffered heavy destruction by fire sometime in the latter part of the tenth century B.C.E. This well-sealed conflagration level provides a firm terminus ante quem for the use of that structure and thus for the inscription itself. The incising of the stone must have occurred sometime prior to the construction of the house or building that ultimately incorporated it,[38] so the writing must date no later than the mid-tenth century B.C.E. In other words, the terminus ante quem for the actual engraving of the stone relates directly to the *construction* date of Local Level III and not to the later time of its *destruction*, from which the bulk of the pottery described above would derive.[39] Just how long before the construction of this tenth-century building someone wrote the alphabet on the stone remains difficult to determine. That excavators recovered from the area of the flagstone room a number of other ground stone objects similar to the bowl-side of the inscribed stone may suggest the erstwhile existence of an earlier tenth-century structure that was dismantled to provide building materials for the two rooms that have survived. The excavation area on the eastern shoulder of the mound, however, has not yielded any intact levels from this possible phase, though they may exist elsewhere on the tell.

Five seasons of excavation at Tel Zayit, with the application of tight stratigraphic controls, have clarified the depositional history of the site prior to, during, and after this mid- to late-tenth-century period. Following the close of the Late Bronze Age and the accumulation of over 6 m of occupational levels ranging from the LBA I through the LBA IIB periods, no substantial settlement of the site occurred during the Iron Age I period. The evidence thus far clearly indicates that the Philistines did not establish a presence at the former Late Bronze city and that very little Philistine pottery found its way to the abandoned site.

In the succeeding Iron IIA period (tenth century), there arose a new town (at least on the summit of the mound), which knew no prior cultural connections to any group in the area. The city's design now incorporated a series of rooms or buildings around the shoulder of the tell. During this phase, the stratigraphic and cultural history of the site seems to parallel closely that of nearby Lachish (just 7.06 km south-southeast of Tel Zayit), with both sites maintaining their principal cultural affinities with the highlands to the east and serving as borderland settlements that marked the westernmost Judahite frontier. In fact, if the recently published interpretation of the tenth-

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[38] A simple field experiment with the stone in situ revealed the impossibility of someone having incised the letters after the stone had been set in place in the wall.

[39] This situation raises a basic principle of field archeology, namely, that the intact or reparable pottery recovered from any given stratum generally belongs to the final phase of that stratum (see Tappy 1992: 5, n. 8; Albright 1943: 2, n. 1).

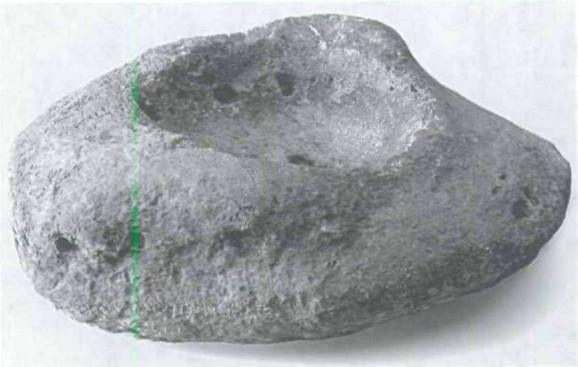

Fig. 12. The Tel Zayit Stone (in profile).

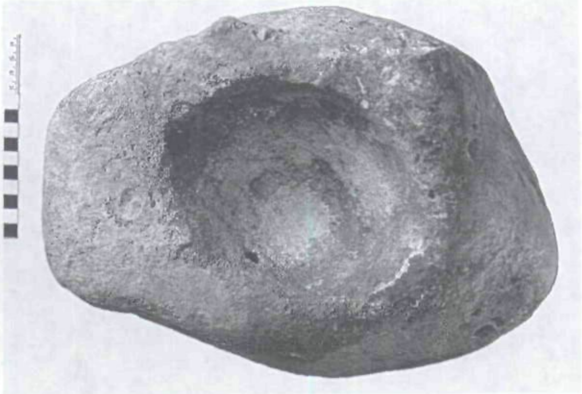

Fig. 13. The Tel Zayit Stone (top view of the hollow cavity).

century Lachish Level V proves correct (see Ussishkin 2004: Vols. 1: 76–78; 2: 411–16), then Tel Zayit seems to have represented a stronger Judahite presence in the Shephelah during the early Iron IIA period than even Lachish itself—and to have anticipated by at least half a century the burgeoning occupation of Lachish IVd–a. Currently, the preliminary analyses of the stratigraphy and pottery from Tel Zayit present no reason to doubt these tentative historical conclusions.

During the course of the ninth century B.C.E., the political organization of the Shephelah underwent significant changes. Lachish assumed its premiere place among the Judahite sites in the region,[40] while Tel Zayit, according to its remains, fostered increasing connections with the culture(s) of the coastal plain.[41] But even some of the coastal-style ceramic forms that appear at ninth-century Tel Zayit were manufactured locally in the Shephelah, and various inland forms or other traditions common to both the coastal and highland areas continue to appear at the site. Given the borderlands location of Tel Zayit, this situation occasions no surprise. Refinement of our understanding of all these periods (especially the ninth century B.C.E.) at Tel Zayit requires further statistical analysis and detailed study of the ceramic industries represented there, as well as at other sites in the region. At any rate, the evident realignment of cultural (and political?) affiliations occurred around a time when Tel Zayit suffered a second destruction by fire, this time in the late ninth century and very possibly at the hands of Hazael of Damascus. This dating receives support from a series of radiocarbon tests conducted on materials retrieved from Tel Zayit; moreover, recent excavations at Tell eṣ-Ṣâfi, located 8.09 km to the north-northeast of Tel Zayit, have provided close stratigraphic and ceramic parallels relating to this event.

Various epigraphic discoveries dating from the eighth century B.C.E. verify the continued use of writing at Tel Zayit and indicate a sustained or renewed connection to Judah despite the earlier rise in coastal ceramic traditions. Finally, it bears repeating that the stratigraphic sequence outlined here provides a secure context and date for the Tel Zayit Abecedary. Indeed, this situation presents a rare occurrence

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[40] According to Herzog's revised chronology for Arad, this transition would have occurred at roughly the same time that Arad evolved from the "enclosed settlement" of Stratum XII to the fortress of Stratum XI. More work is needed, however, to ascertain the exact nature of and chronological relationship between the Lachish V–IV and Arad XII–XI transitions. In the publication of the pottery from Tel Arad, L. Singer-Avitz terminates Arad XII at Shishak's campaign between 930 and 925 B.C.E. (contra Herzog's proclivity to extend this stratum through the first half of the ninth century). Arad XI, in turn, along with Lachish IV and Beersheba IV, ended with the earthquake around 760 B.C.E. (Singer-Avitz 2002: 114–16, 162; cf. Ussishkin 2004: Vol. 1, 82–83). If, as Herzog suggests (2002: 94), Arad XI was contemporary with Beersheba V, then it likely began during the closing years of the tenth century B.C.E.

[41] This influence seems to have resulted from peaceful contacts (perhaps associated with Libnah's mid-ninth-century revolt against Judah mentioned in 2 Kgs 8:22; 2 Chr 21:10), and the Philistines never seem to have launched an attempt to expand eastward from their southern coastal territory. For example, when the expansionistic Uzziah moved against Gath, Ashdod, and towns in northern Philistia in the mid-eighth century B.C.E. (2 Chr 26:6), the Philistines eventually responded (2 Chr 28:16–18) by pushing into the Shephelah through the Elah and Sorek systems (i.e., via the old Judahite District 2), not through the more southerly Guvrin or Lachish Valley areas (i.e., neither through District 4 nor 3).

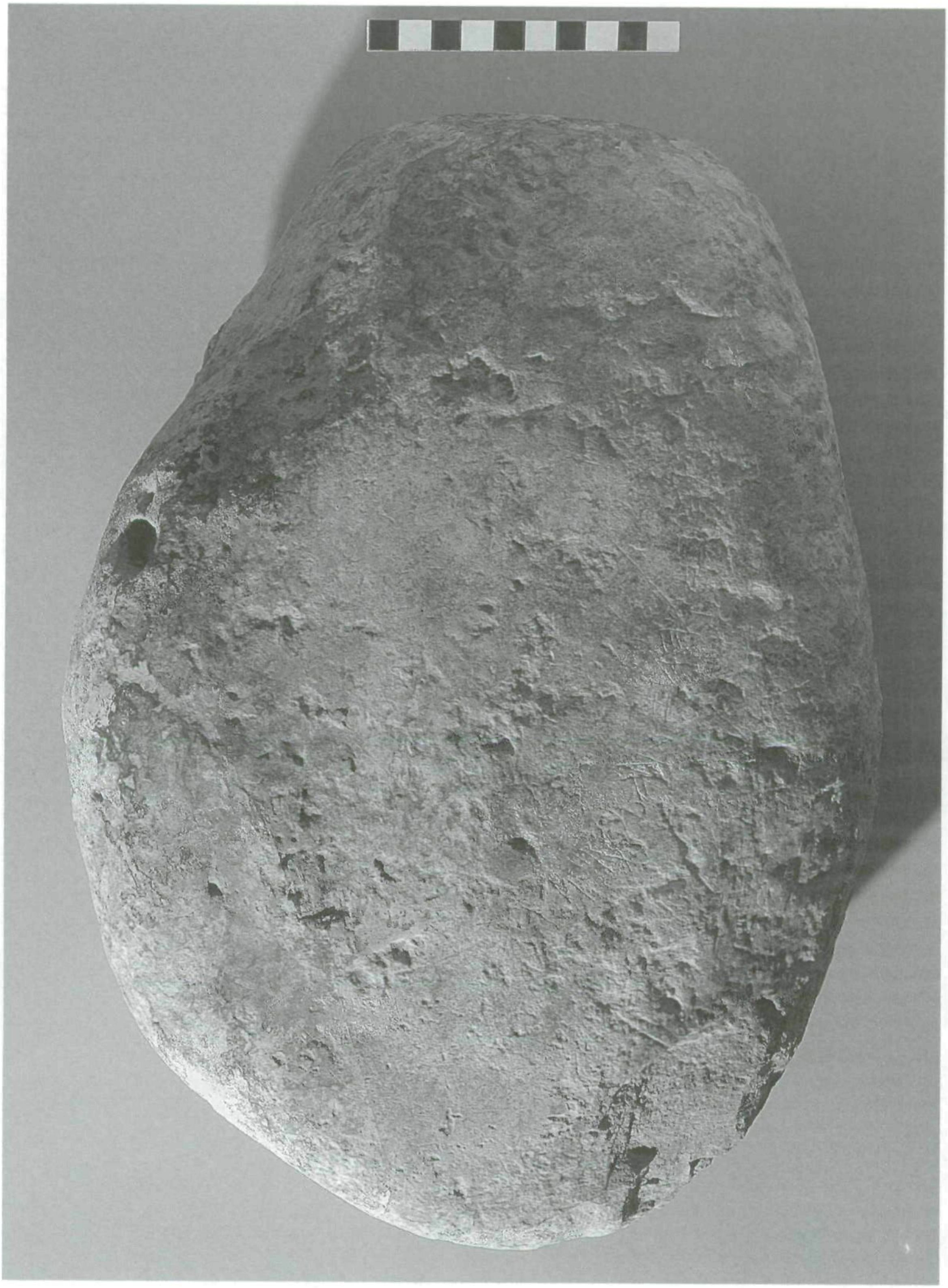

Fig. 14. The Tel Zayit Stone (top view of the inscribed side).

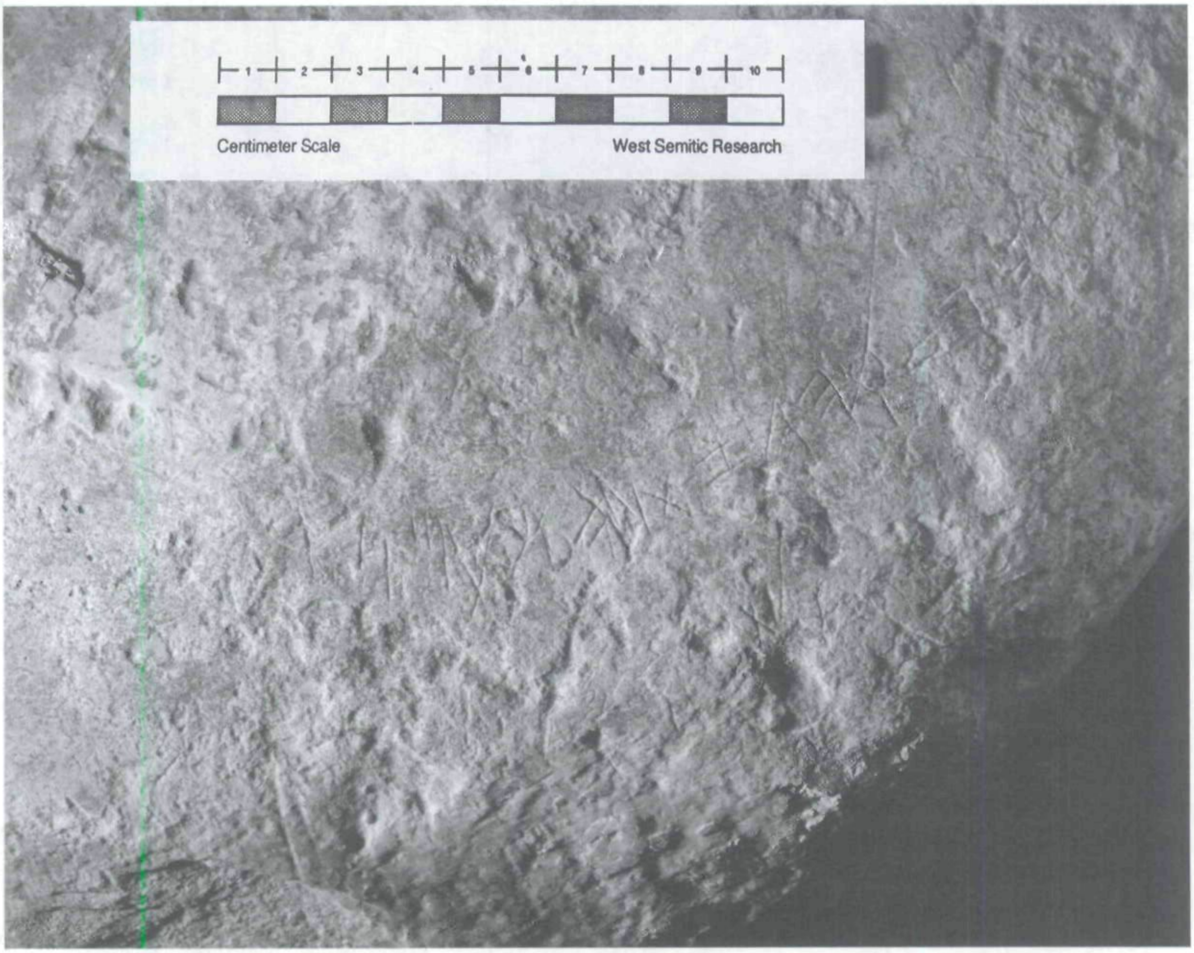

Fig. 15. The Tel Zayit Abecedary: Overview of the two-line inscription.

among all the inscriptions pertinent to the discussion of the tenth to ninth centuries in Israel. As the succeeding pages will show, the palaeography of the abecedary fits well with our interpretation of the archaeological data.

THE TEL ZAYIT ABECEDARY IN ITS PALAEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

As noted above, the inscribed boulder (fig. 12) has a large cavity ground into one side (fig. 13); the other side, though slightly convex, is relatively flat (fig. 14). Several other ground stone objects of similar size and design have been found at Tel Zayit. Though the original function of these objects has not been definitely determined, they may have served as mortars, door sockets, or basins of some kind. In any case, the utilization of the Tel Zayit stone as a writing surface seems likely to have been secondary to its original purpose, so that the subsequent appropriation of the inscribed boulder as a building block might be described as tertiary.

The two-line inscription (figs. 15–17) was incised on the flat side of the stone, where the surface shows evidence of smoothing, most probably to prepare it to receive the writing. The limestone is very hard, and the letters were not deeply cut. As a result, the inscription is difficult to see except when brought into relief by light at an acute angle. In the course of the stone's various uses—and with the vicissitudes of time—the inscribed surface was crisscrossed by innumerable accidental and extraneous scratches, several of which intersect with the lines drawn by the scribe and complicate the interpretation of some of the letters. Yet another factor that sometimes obscures the writing is the scattered presence of mineral incrustation deposited over the centuries on the surface of the rock. In spite of these difficulties, however, it is clear that the shallow incisions constitute the letters of a linear alphabet sequentially written—in short, an abecedary or abecedarium. The first fifteen letters in line 1 are clearly legible. The subsequent signs in line 1 and those in line 2 are less clear and present the epigrapher with some uncertainties, but there can be no reasonable doubt that, taken as a whole, the inscription consists of the 22 letters characteristic of the Phoenician alphabet and its Hebrew and Aramaic daughter scripts (figs. 15–17).[42]

Thus the inscription may be read as follows:

(1) *ʾ b g d w h ḥ z ṭ y l k m n* ⌈*s*⌉ ⌈*p*⌉ ⌈ʿ⌉ ⌈*ṣ*⌉
(2) ⌈*q*⌉ ⌈*r*⌉ *š* ⌈*t*⌉

It will be immediately seen that the abecedary departs four times from the traditional order of the Phoenician-Hebrew-Aramaic alphabet. The first such departure—*waw he* in place of the expected *he waw*—is to our knowledge without parallel. The second—*ḥet zayin* in place of the usual *zayin ḥet*—may have a counterpart in the Proto-Canaanite ʿIzbet Ṣarṭah abecedary of the 12th century B.C.E. (Kochavi 1977; Demsky 1977; 1986), where the larger sequence seems to be . . . *h* $w^?$ *ḥ z ṭ y*. . . .[43] The third departure from the traditional order of the alphabet is the extraordinary reversal of *kap* and *lamed*. Whatever the status of the three other sequence inversions, this one seems very likely to have been a mistake. After writing *lamed kap*, the scribe left a space between the *kap* and *mem*, as though in recognition that the *lamed* should have gone there, and then filled the space with a large X, quite likely a graphic acknowledgment of the blunder. The final reversal of letters—*pe ʿayin* instead of *ʿayin pe*—is the least surprising, since it is already recognized as a well-attested alternative to the traditional order. *Pe* seems to precede *ʿayin* in the 12th-century Proto-Canaanite abecedary from ʿIzbet Ṣarṭah, and it does so without question in three successive Hebrew abecedaries written on a pithos of the beginning of the eighth century from Kuntillet ʿAjrud (*HAE* 1: 62–63, pl. 4.1, 3–4; *HI* 295–96). The same sequence (*pe ʿayin*) is found a number of times in biblical acrostic poetry (Lam 2:16–17; 3:46–51; 4:16–17; Ps 10:6–8; Prov 31:25–26 [LXX]). In this last instance, then, the departure from the traditional order of letters is clearly a consequence of adherence to an alternative convention rather than scribal error. The same may be true of the *ḥet zayin* sequence in view of its parallel at ʿIzbet Ṣarṭah. We should be cautious, therefore, in dismissing *waw he* as an error, even though it seems probable, for the reasons given, that *lamed kap* is in fact a mistake.

In anticipation of the conclusions of the detailed palaeographic discussion that follows, we can characterize the Tel Zayit Abecedary as representative of the linear alphabetic script of central and southern Canaan at the beginning of the first millennium B.C.E. This script is an inland development of the mature Phoenician tradition of the early Iron Age, but in the tenth century it already exhibits characteristics

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[42] In view of the shallowness of the incisions of the abecedary and of the numerous collateral problems that afflict the face of the stone as a whole—accidental scratching and gouging, incrustation by mineral deposition, deliberate abrasion for surface preparation and modification for secondary use, etc.—it is easy to imagine that other writing, if it existed, might easily go undetected. For this reason, we have made a photographic record of the surface of the entire stone, and wherever we have found features that might suggest the presence of other writing, however badly eroded or obscured, we have begun careful investigations. The results of these inquiries will be reported in due course, but one finding should be mentioned at this point. During his preliminary, in situ examination of the stone, Professor Tappy noticed the apparent form of a well-incised *zayin* at a point roughly in the middle of the flat surface of the stone, approximately 2.5 cm above the *kap* of the abecedary. Our further examination of the stone in Jerusalem showed that this *zayin* is preceded by incisions consistent with the form of *ʿayin* and followed by the vertical stem and possible head-strokes of a *reš* (see fig. 18 below). The resulting "reading," *ʿzr*, could easily be interpreted as a word, if it does not, in fact, turn out to be a configuration of accidental marks. If the former, we should presumably render *ʿzr* as " ʿAzar," the hypocoristic form of a personal name, *ʿAzar-DN*, that is, "[The god *DN*] has helped." Was ʿAzar the name of the scribe of the abecedary? We shall never know the answer to that question, but further research should confirm whether *ʿzr* is a second, short inscription on the Tel Zayit stone or a phantom reading created by superficial imperfections in the limestone.

[43] The unexpected form of the ʿIzbet Ṣarṭah *zayin* has been convincingly explained by Cross (1980: 10–11 and fig. 7 = Cross 2003: 222–23 and fig. 32.7) as a graphic survivor of the original pictographic *zayin* sign, also preserved in the Old South Semitic *z* sign but eventually displaced in the Northwest Semitic scripts by the original *ð* sign (parallel horizontal lines) after the widespread merging of *z* and *ð*.

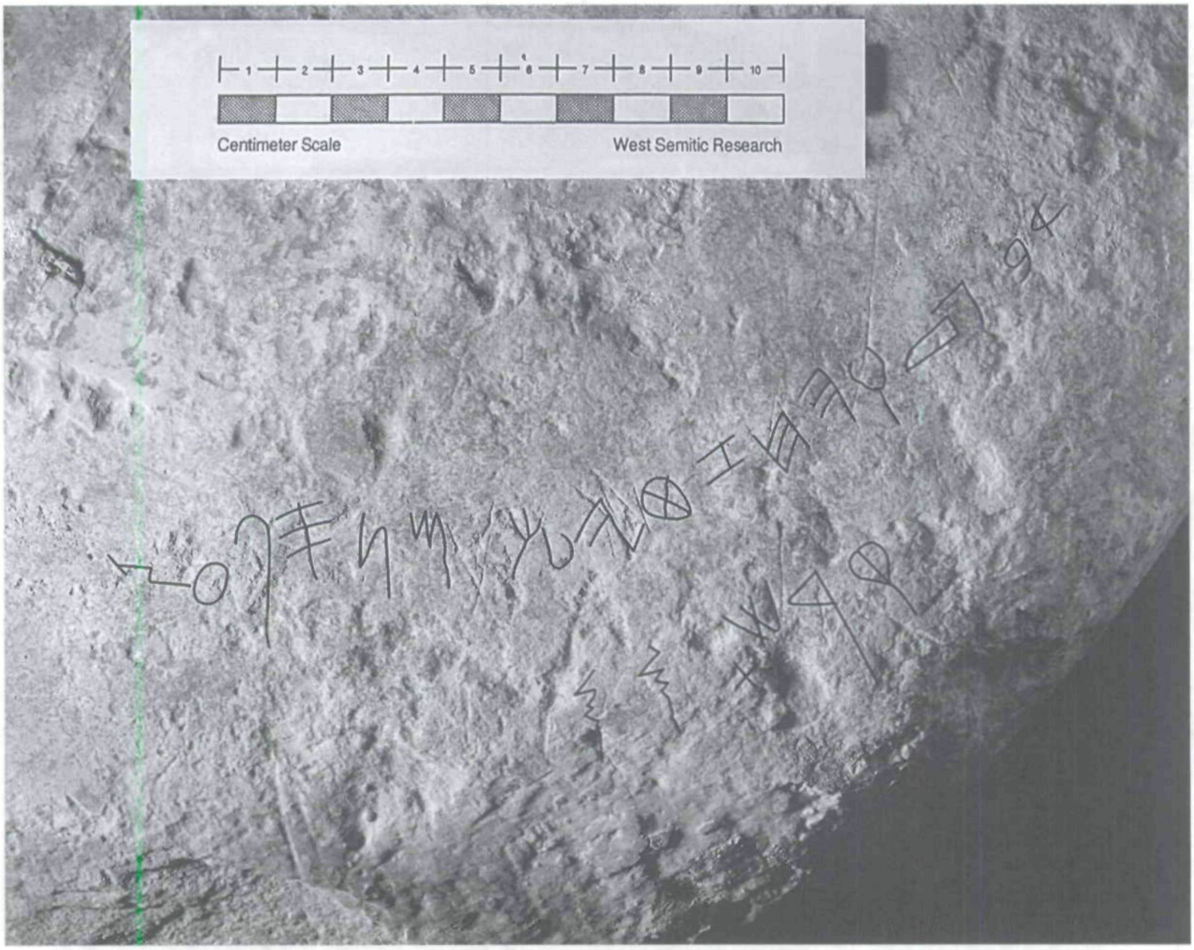

Fig. 16. The Tel Zayit Abecedary: Overlay of letters on the two-line inscription.

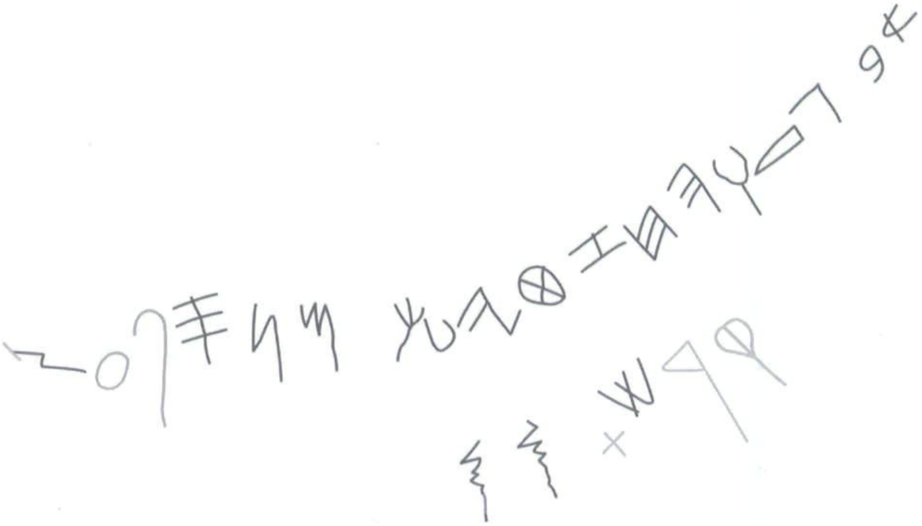

Fig. 17. Tel Zayit Abecedary: Drawing of the two-line inscription.

that anticipate the distinctive features of the mature Hebrew national script (cf. Cross 1980: 14 = Cross 2003: 226), which is its natural continuation, and of Hebrew's own derivatives, including first and principally Moabite. Surviving specimens of this tenth-century inland script are relatively rare. By far its most important exemplar—and prior to the Tel Zayit discovery, its only extensive representative—is the so-called Gezer Calendar (*AHI* 10.001; *HI* 156–65; *KAI* 182; *TSSI* 1: 1–4).[44] Additionally, a small group of brief inscriptions, all fairly recent discoveries, enlarge the meager tenth-century corpus and inform our understanding of the distribution of the script within its endemic range from the Jezreel Valley south. These include (1) the ownership designation *lnmš* found on the shoulder of a storage jar from Tel ᶜAmal (Tell el-ᶜAṣi, west of Beth-shan) Level 3, which the excavators date to the late tenth century (Levy and Edelstein 1972: 336, fig. 5 [drawing], pl. 25:3, 4; *HAE* 1: 29–30; 3: pl. 1.3; *HI* 3); (2) a rim sherd with a fragmentary inscription ([*b*]*n* . *ḥnn*) incised before firing and found in a tenth-century (Stratum IV) context at Tel Batash in the Judaean Shephelah (Kelm and Mazar 1991: 55–56, fig. 12; 1995: 111, 113, fig. 6.4; *HAE* 1:30; 3: pl. 1.4; *HI* 30); (3) the personal name *ḥnn* carved on a gaming board from Beth-Shemesh and dated by the excavators (following a palaeographical assessment by F. M. Cross) to the latter part of the tenth century (Bunimovitz and Lederman 1997a: 29; 1997b: 48 [photograph] and 75–76); and (4) a short inscription, probably an ownership designation ([]*lnḥ*[*m*]), incised after firing on a body sherd from a storage jar found on a floor belonging to Stratum VI (tenth century) at Rehob (A. Mazar 2003: 172–74, figs. 1–2). It might be expected that this inventory would include one or more of several other recently discovered inscriptions—from Arad,[45] Eshtemoaᶜ,[46] Tell el-Faraᶜ (South),[47] Hazor,[48] and Ḥorvat Rosh Zayit[49]—but

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[44] The little tablet was found in 1908 during the excavation of Gezer by R. A. S. Macalister for the Palestine Exploration Fund. It was discovered in debris from Macalister's "Fourth Semitic" period, a mixed assemblage of materials spanning the entirety of Iron II (tenth to sixth centuries B.C.E.). The customary assignment of the Gezer Calendar to the latter part of the tenth century, therefore, has relied almost entirely on its archaic script and orthography—and on comparisons with contemporary Phoenician and later Hebrew inscriptions—rather than on any well-defined contextual or stratigraphic information. This situation underscores the importance of the recovery of the Tel Zayit stone from a secure and well-understood archaeological context, and the special value of this situation for enhancing and controlling our understanding of the palaeography of the alphabetic scripts of the early Iron Age in Canaan.

[45] The pre-Shishak tenth-century date (ca. 1000–925 B.C.E.) assigned by the excavators (Y. Aharoni 1981: 128–29) to Arad Stratum XI, with its four associated ostraca, has now been generally abandoned in favor of the assumption that Stratum XII, which yielded no inscriptions (except the very poorly preserved Ostracon 81; Y. Aharoni 1981: 101), is the principal tenth-century level and that Stratum XI, with its casemate fortification, was founded in the last decades of the tenth century following Shishak's raid (see, for example, A. Mazar 1990: 373; 1997: 160–61; and most recently Singer-Avitz 2002: 114–16; cf. n. 40 above). According to Herzog (2002: 14, 26, 94) and Singer-Avitz (2002: 114–16, 162), Stratum XI may have persisted for a full century and a half, until the mid-eighth century. If they are correct, however, at least one of the Stratum XI ostraca—viz., No. 76, with its archaic script (Y. Aharoni 1981: 98–99, 137)—should be assigned to an early phase of the stratum on palaeographic grounds; cf. especially the large, symmetrical *zayin*, with no hint of the downward curving ticks characteristically seen at the right edge of the two horizontals in later (early eighth-century) examples of Hebrew *zayin*, and *mem*, with its upright, unrotated head and relatively short stem reminiscent of the Gezer Calendar form. Even so, it is difficult to date Ostracon 76 as early as the end of the tenth century, even if that is the date of the first phase of Stratum XI (cf. Herzog 2002: 14, 26, 92–93, who now associates the beginning of Stratum XI with the second half of the ninth century). The descending strokes of the two *mem*s and the two *nun*s of Ostracon 76 are not straight but curved, bending to the left, a characteristic palaeographic feature of the Hebrew script not otherwise known before the latter part of the ninth century (cf. Renz's "Mitte 9. Jhdt" date for Arad Ostracon 76 [*HAE* 1: 44–45]).

[46] Three of five jars containing a silver hoard found at es-Samuᶜ (Eshtemoaᶜ) in the Judaean hills south of Hebron bear the painted inscription *ḥmš* (Yeivin 1987; *HAE* 1: 65–66; 3: pl. 2:5; *HI* 153–54). Though the jars have ceramic parallels found in strata ranging in date from the late tenth to the eighth centuries, the inscription, with its apparently archaic *mem* (cf. *HI* 153), can hardly be dated later than the early ninth century and might well be late tenth. But the inscriptions show peculiarities of stance (one *šin* is inverted), thus making the forms of the letters (and *mem* in particular) difficult to evaluate with confidence.

[47] An ostracon found in 1999 at Tell el-Faraᶜ (South) bears a five-letter inscription (*lʾdnn*) written in ink (Lehmann and Schneider 2000). The ostracon came from a transitional Iron I–Iron II context, and the letters have an archaic appearance, but the location of the site on the Philistine periphery of Phoenicia (Knauf and Niemann 1999) gives reason for caution in assigning the writing to a script tradition; on this issue in general, see Lemaire 2000.

[48] Though the Hazor excavations of the 1950s brought to light a number of early Iron II inscriptions, these did not include a tenth-century inscription in the South Canaanite tradition in which the Hebrew script developed. In fact, no inscribed materials were found in the principal Iron IIA level (Stratum X). Stratum IX, which the excavators dated to the late tenth and early ninth centuries, did yield a small potsherd bearing five letters of a fragmentary inscription inscribed after firing (Yadin et al. 1961–1989: 346–47, pl. 357:1), but the reading [ ]*šʾ zy l*[ ] strongly suggests that the language is Aramaic rather than Hebrew (or Phoenician).

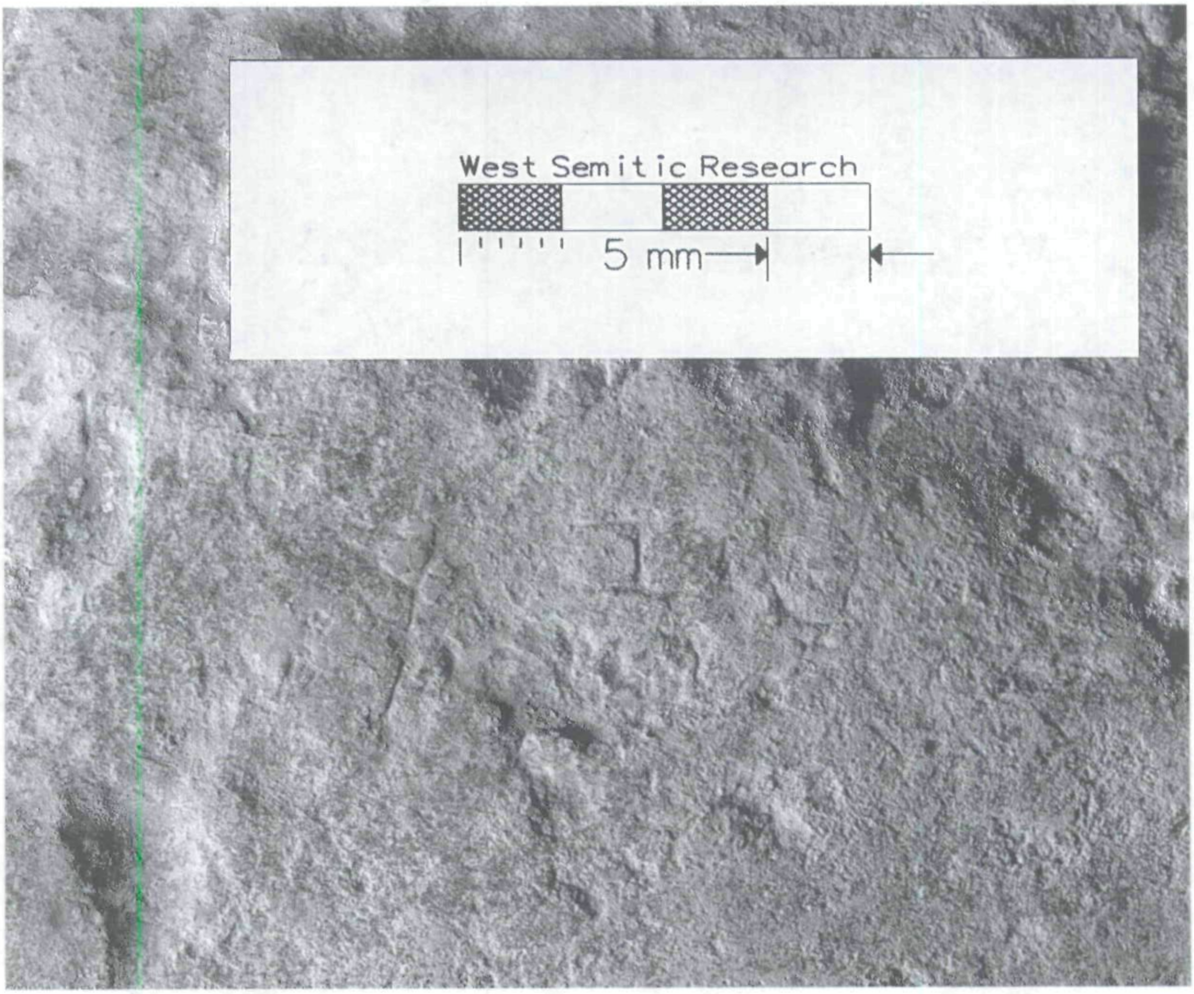

Fig. 18. Three letters (ʿ-z-r) positioned above the abecedary (see n. 42).

these items have been excluded because they cannot be shown to be tenth century in date, or because they do not belong to the South Canaanite script tradition defined by the Gezer Calendar and its congeners, or for other reasons.

What we have just described as an inland, South Canaanite development of the Phoenician script was coeval with the continuing use of the main branch of Phoenician in the tenth century B.C.E. This main branch is the script tradition represented by the epitaph carved on the upper rim and lid of the sarcophagus of Aḥiram, king of Byblos (*KAI* 1, and pl. 1; Lundberg 2004: pls. 10–24), and by the inscriptions of four of his successors (*KAI* 4, 5, 6, and 7, and pl. 2), two of whose inscriptions are engraved on objects bearing the images and cartouches of the first two kings of the Egyptian 22nd Dynasty, Shoshenq I (945–924 B.C.E.) and Osorkon I (924–889 B.C.E.). Taken together, these five inscriptions provide us with a sequence roughly spanning the tenth century.

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[49] A fragmentary ink inscription on the outer surface of a sherd from a storage jar was found in the Phoenician fortress at Ḥorvat Rosh Zayit in the northern Lower Galilee alongside a large number of other storage jars dated archaeologically to the late tenth century (Gal 1990: 95; Gal and Alexandre 2000: 133–34). The inscription ([ ]*n ḥmr*[ ]), with its four-barred *ḥet* and relatively advanced *mem* and *nun*, is difficult to associate comfortably with either the mainstream Phoenician tradition or its inland, southern development (*HAE* 1: 37–38; 3: pl. 1:2), either of which might be expected at the site, which shows extensive Phoenician–Israelite interaction. Even so, the former (Phoenician) seems more probable in view of the primarily Phoenician character of the stronghold, and it has been argued that the palaeography favors this interpretation as well (Lemaire 1997: 162).

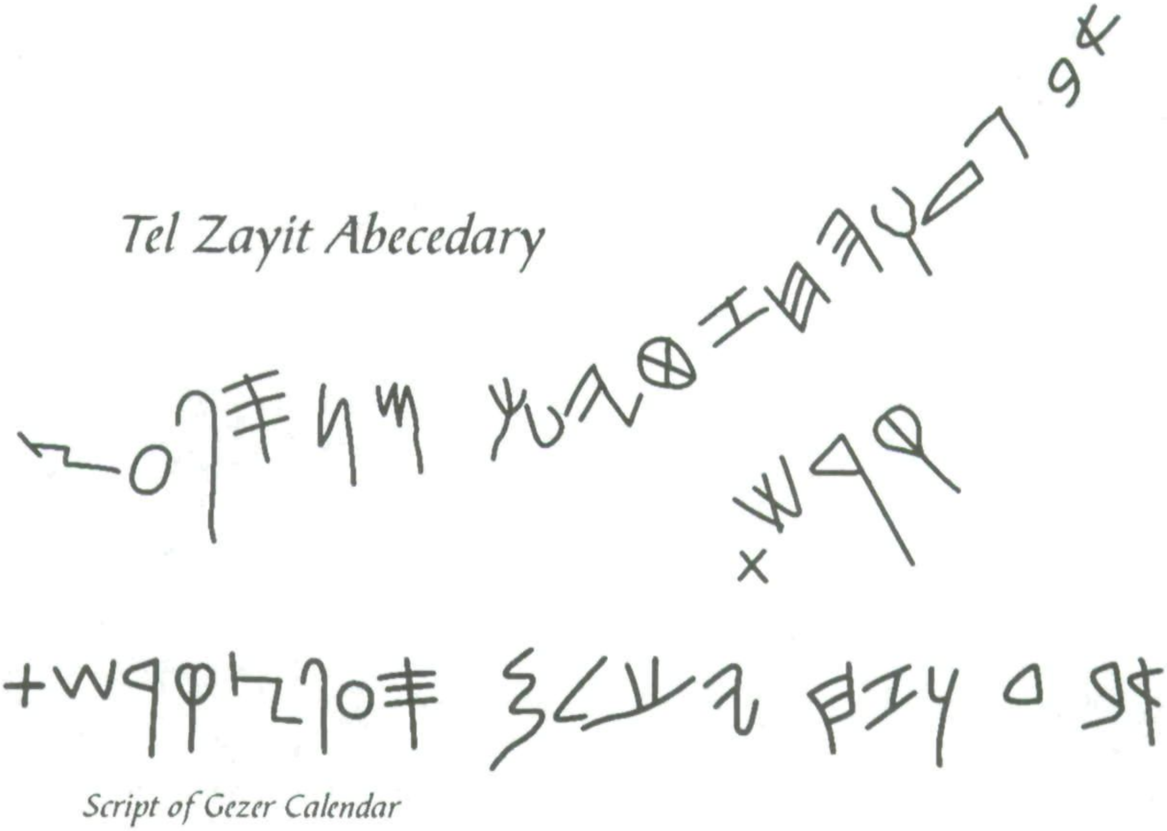

Fig. 19. A comparison of scripts in the Tel Zayit Abecedary and the Gezer Calendar.

Though the mainstream Phoenician script was at home on the Lebanese littoral, as the Byblian sequence illustrates, it spread beyond the homeland at an early date, evidently as a by-product of Phoenician mercantile activity, and penetrated inland via the Jezreel–Beth-shan corridor while also expanding westward into the Mediterranean basin. Markers of this early dissemination survive in the form of inscribed luxury items, namely, bronze bowls from Tekke near Knossos on Crete (Sznycer 1979) and Kefar Veradim in Upper Galilee (Alexandre 2002a; 2002b) bearing similar legends written in archaic Phoenician script that can scarcely be dated later than the end of the 11th century.[50] When compared with the South Canaanite development described above, these tenth- and eleventh-century texts show that the Phoenician parent script was a conservative tradition, which retained specific archaic forms, such as the trident-form *kap*, and resisted the general tendency toward the elongation of a number of letter forms (notably *ʾalep*, *he*, *waw*, *kap*, *mem*, *nun*, and *reš*)—a tendency already clearly observable in its contemporary South Canaanite development. This resistance is underscored by the persistence into the ninth century of a preference for compact, well-proportioned characters of the kind seen, for example, in maritime Phoenician inscriptions, such as the so-called Honeyman inscription from Cyprus (*KAI* 30, and pl. 3) and the *taršiš* inscription from Nora in Sardinia (*KAI* 46, and pl. 2).

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[50] For the date of the Tekke bowl, see Cross 1980: 17 = Cross 2003: 229; cf. Puech 1983: 377, 389); for the Kefar Veradim bowl, see Naveh apud Alexandre 2002b: 67*. In discussing the date of the Kefar Veradim bowl, Alexandre stresses the chronology of the associated pottery (2002a), which she describes as "a homogeneous repertoire dated to the tenth century B.C.E." (2002b: 67*), and prefers a tenth-century date for the bowl (cf. Sass 1988: 153). She is skeptical about the designation of both bowls as heirlooms. On the other hand, both bronze bowls are luxury items found in tombs—reasonable candidates for heirloom pieces—and it is difficult to accept a tenth-century date for the Phoenician inscriptions, both of which include dotted *ʿayin* and other demonstrably archaic features.

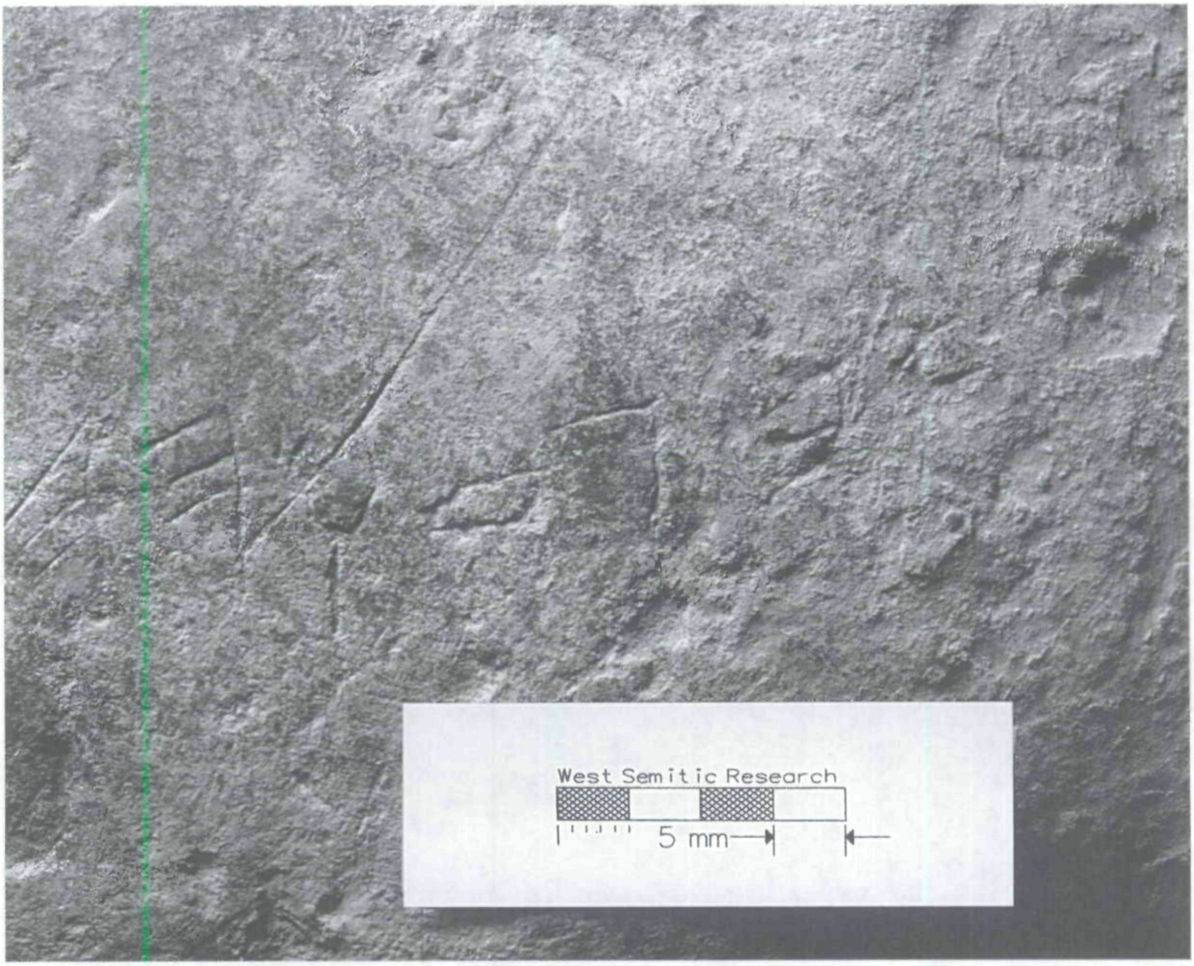

Fig. 20. The Tel Zayit Abecedary: *ʾAlep* through *ḥet*.

For palaeographical purposes, therefore, the comparison of the Tel Zayit inscription with the Byblian sequence is most useful for shedding light on the relationship of the abecedary's script to the originally coastal tradition that gave rise to the abecedary's own inland script family. This is true not only for recognizing in the parent script the forms from which certain features of the abecedary derive, but also—and perhaps especially—for highlighting and contextualizing a number of striking archaisms that are preserved in the abecedary in relation to other tenth-century inscriptions in the inland development. Nevertheless, the primary palaeographical comparison of the Tel Zayit inscription must be with the script of this inland development itself, which constitutes the abecedary's own most immediate script family. As already noted, this family comprises the script of the Gezer Calendar (fig. 19) and other inscriptions from inland sites of tenth-century Canaan.

DETAILED PALAEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TEL ZAYIT ABECEDARY

The downstroke or stem of the Tel Zayit *ʾalep* (fig. 20) is elongated compared with tenth-century examples in the Phoenician parent script (the Byblian sequence). As noted above, this elongation of the stems of *ʾalep* and other letters is a sign of the emerging independence of the South Canaanite tradition, to which the Tel Zayit script belongs. Within that tradition, however, the stem of the Tel Zayit *ʾalep* is short, as seen when compared with the stems of the *ʾaleps* of the Gezer Calendar.[51] This intermediate

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[51] By contrast, the *ʾalep* of Ostracon 79 from Arad Stratum XI is very short (Y. Aharoni 1981: 100). Also, the point of convergence of the two horizontals is very close to the left of the vertical

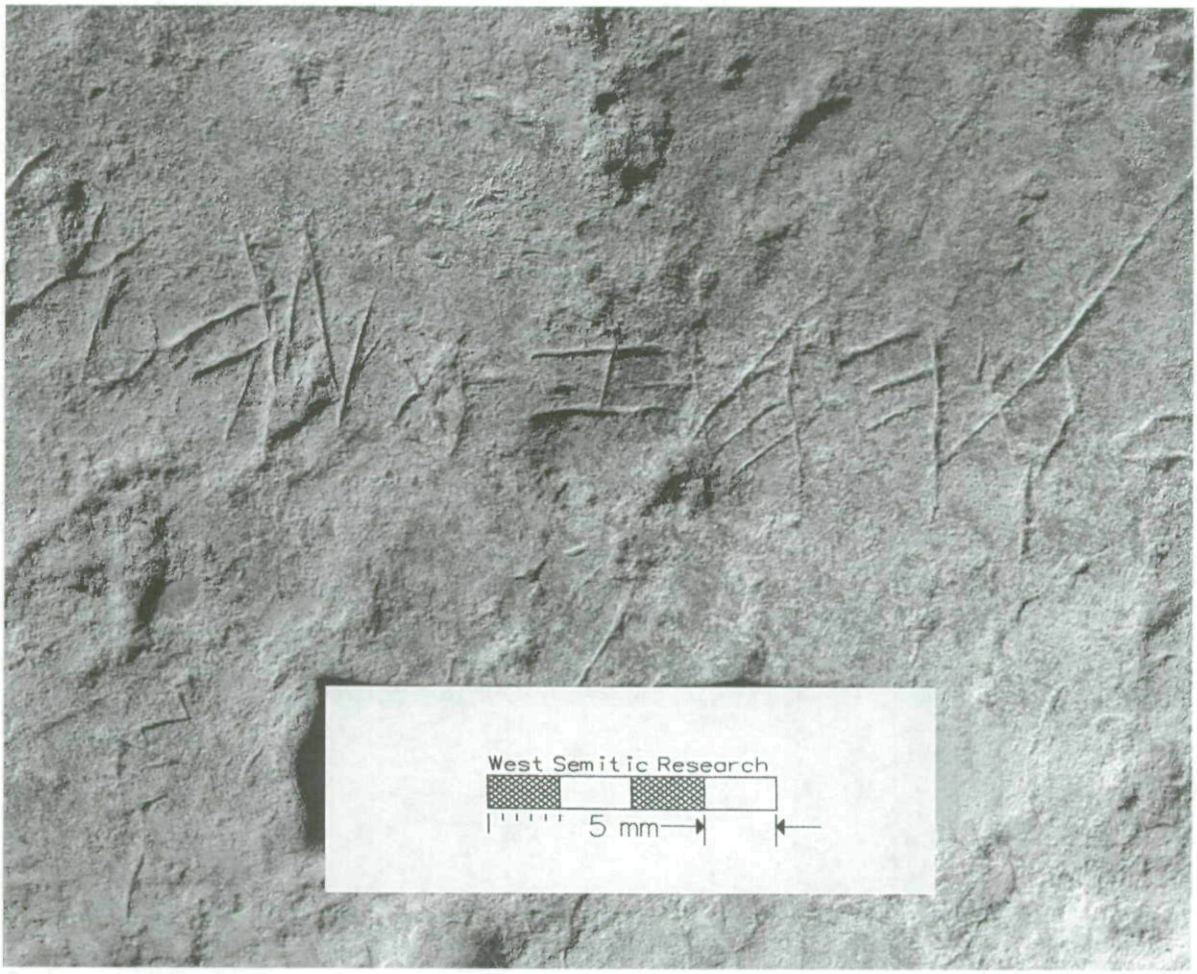

Fig. 21. The Tel Zayit Abecedary: *Waw* through *kap.*

position between the Phoenician parent script and the script of other specimens of the South Canaanite tradition is an indicator of the high relative antiquity of the Tel Zayit Abecedary within the latter tradition. The same is true of the close approach of the stem of the Tel Zayit *ʾalep* to the converging horizontals of the head,[52] a phenomenon reminiscent of the extreme development of this trait in the Byblian series but altogether absent in the Gezer Calendar.

As in the Gezer Calendar, the head of the Tel Zayit *bet* (fig. 20) is rounded and larger than the usually triangular *bet* of the contemporary Phoenician parent script as represented by the Byblian series.[53] This trait is a sign of independent development in the inland, South Canaanite tradition[54] and anticipates the round-headed *bet* of the late ninth-century He-

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stem. Taken together, these features give the Arad sign an especially archaic appearance.

[52] The roundness of the head ("nose") of the *ʾalep*, as it appears in our drawing, is uncertain because of wear on the surface of the stone, but the close approach of the head to the vertical stem is clear in any case.

[53] The triangular-headed *bet* is also the regular form in the 11th-century arrowheads, so that we would have to appeal to Proto-Canaanite forms of the 12th century or earlier for a suitable antecedent for the round-headed form. On the other hand, the round-headed *bet* is well established in Phoenician itself by the last quarter of the ninth century, as seen, for example, in the Kilamuwa orthostat inscription from Zinjirli (*KAI* 24, pl. 27).

[54] Note also the two *bet*s in lines 1 and 3 of Arad Ostracon 76 and the *bet*s in Ostraca 79 and 80 (Y. Aharoni 1981: 99–100). In these *bet*s, which likely date no earlier than the ninth century, the head is not as large as in the Tel Zayit and Gezer inscriptions, but it is rounded rather than triangular. The *bet* in line 3 of Ostracon 76 is reproduced in the drawing with a rather pointed "nose" (Y. Aharoni 1981: 99), but this does not seem to be a faithful representation of the faded sign in the photograph.

brew script, as seen in the three examples of *bet* that appear in the stone bowl inscription from Kuntillet ʿAjrud (*HAE* 1: 56; 3: pl. 2.10; *HI* 283–84).

The Tel Zayit *gimel* (fig. 20) is very large and lacks the counterclockwise rotation that characterizes its subsequent development. The angle formed by the horizontal and vertical strokes is only slightly acute—almost a right angle. Taken together, these traits give the Tel Zayit *gimel* an extremely archaic appearance, even in comparison with that of the Aḥiram epitaph of ca. 1000 B.C.E (*KAI* 1, and pl. 1) and the so-called bronze spatula from Byblos (*KAI* 3, and pl. 1), in both of which the *gimel*, though upright (or even slightly rotated *clockwise*), is drawn with an acute angle of 30° to 50°. For a close parallel to the Tel Zayit form, we should have to look to *gimel*s from the script of the 11th-century arrowheads, such as that of Gerbaʿl published by Milik (1961; photograph in Sass 1988: pl. 203).[55]

The triangle of the Tel Zayit *dalet* (fig. 20) is peculiarly narrow, especially in comparison with the well-proportioned *dalet* of line 3 of the Gezer Calendar; but similarly compressed forms occur in formal and cursive inscriptions from many periods and many script traditions, so that the narrowness should be regarded as a scribal fluctuation and not a diagnostic feature. Otherwise the form is unremarkable and archaic, evidently lacking even the rudimentary beginning of the stem that would characterize the later *dalet*. An apparent indentation near the "nose" in the upper horizontal is visible in photographs of the Tel Zayit *dalet*, but close inspection shows that this indentation is not a feature of the letter form or even a scribal slip; it is an artifact of surface incrustation that was later deposited on the stone.

Waw is an extraordinary form at Tel Zayit (figs. 20–21). Its broad, symmetrical, bowl-shaped head is strikingly archaic compared with the Gezer Calendar form, in which the head has lost its symmetry with the bowl in beginning its migration to the left. The Tel Zayit *waw* is best compared with the early Phoenician parent forms seen in the Byblian sequence. Note also the persistence of this form in the ninth-century Mesha stele (*KAI* 181), where it is a survival from the time of the borrowing of the Moabite script from early Hebrew. The other noteworthy feature of the Tel Zayit *waw* is its elongated downstroke, a trait that contrasts with the short stem of its Phoenician prototype and associates it with other specimens of the inland script of the tenth century that share a tendency to lengthen the descendant strokes of certain letters (especially *ʾalep*, *he*, *waw*, *kap*, *mem*, *nun*, and *reš*), thus giving the script an elongated appearance in contrast to the compact style of contemporary Phoenician.

He (figs. 20–21) is produced according to the common pattern of the early first millennium B.C.E., with three horizontals of approximately equal length attached to a vertical spine that extends downward from its point of contact with the upper horizontal, thus forming an elongated stem beneath the lower horizontal. As just pointed out in the discussion of *waw*, this elongation is characteristic of a number of letter forms in the tenth-century script from inland Canaan (especially *ʾalep*, *he*, *waw*, *kap*, *mem*, *nun*, and *reš*), and in the case of the Tel Zayit *he* the elongation is pronounced compared with the shape of the short-stemmed *he* of the Phoenician parent script, as represented by the Byblian sequence. On the other hand, the stem of the Tel Zayit *he* shows no *upward* extension above the top horizontal—an archaic feature that survives occasionally in the Aḥiram epitaph (*KAI* 1, and pl. 1) alongside forms without the upper extension. *He* is lacking in the Gezer Calendar.

Ḥet (fig. 21) consists of two vertical strokes flanking three horizontals. The horizontals are drawn from right to left in descending lines, so that they join the two verticals at oblique angles.[56] This oblique form—which is also found, for example, in the Yeḥimilk inscription from Byblos (*KAI* 4)—was employed in the early Phoenician scripts alongside the more typical square *ḥet* drawn with right angles (cf. Cross 1995: 404, fig. 2 = Cross 2003: 55, fig. 4.2). The square form is also found in tenth-century inscriptions from the South Canaanite interior, as seen clearly in most of the eight (!) occurrences of *ḥet* in the Gezer Calendar and, for example, in the tenth-century *ḥet*s incised on a rim sherd from Tel Batash (Kelm and Mazar 1991: 55–56, fig. 12; 1995: 111, 113, fig. 6.4; *HAE* 1:30; 3: pl. 1.4; *HI* 30) and on a gaming board from Beth-Shemesh (Bunimovitz and Lederman

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[55] *Gimel* is lacking in the Gezer Calendar. The few examples that occur in ostraca from Stratum XI at Arad are of uncertain identification or too poorly preserved for palaeographical analysis. The lone surviving sign in line 7 of Arad Ostracon 76, which the editors interpreted as *gimel* (Y. Aharoni 1981: 99), is well preserved, but we prefer to read it as *reš*.

[56] The Tel Zayit *ḥet* is crossed by an extraneous stroke (secondary damage to the stone) that gives an exaggerated impression of the obliqueness of the sign in most photographs.

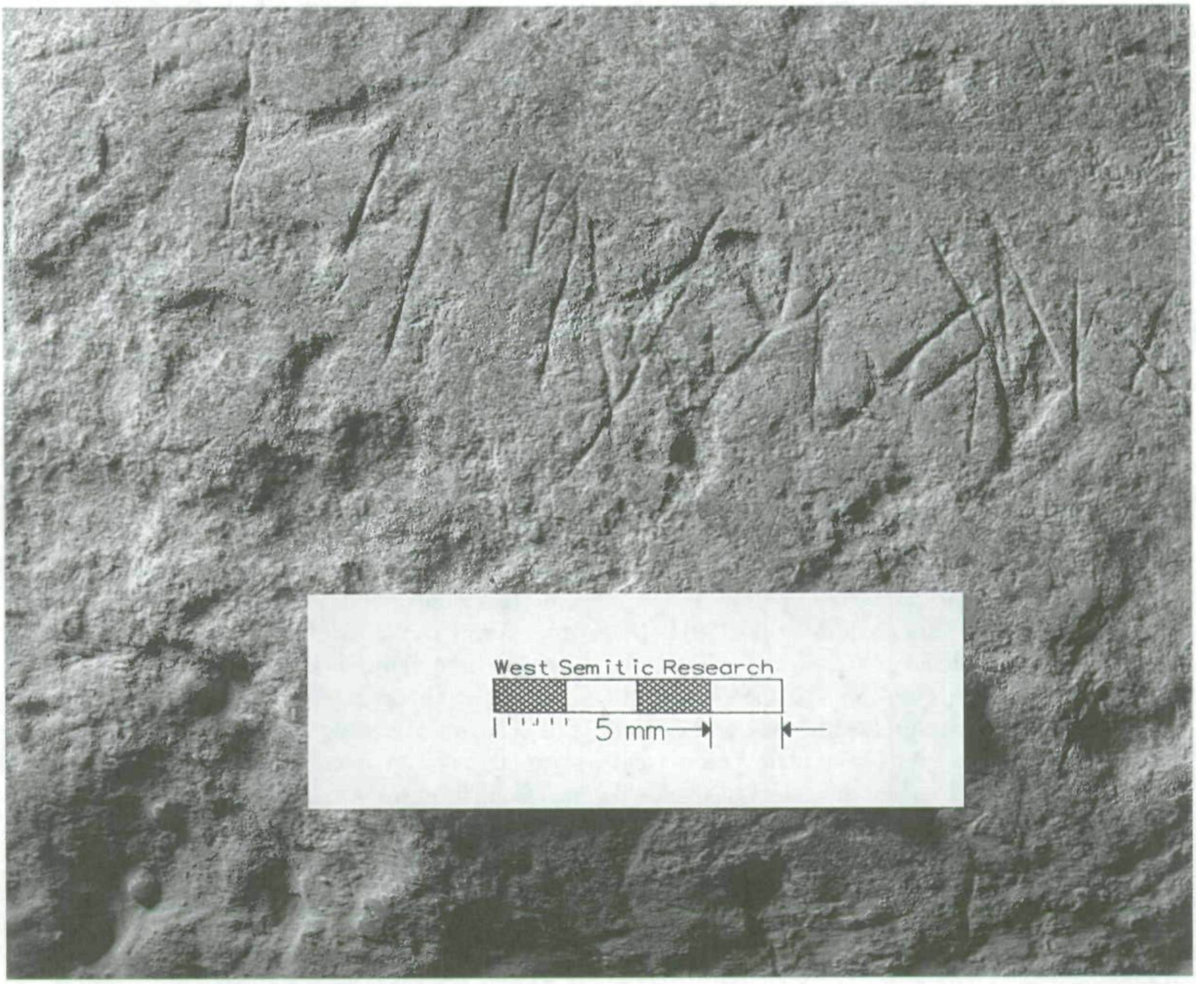

Fig. 22. The Tel Zayit Abecedary: *Ṭet* through *samek*.

1997a: 29; 1997b: 48 [photograph], 75–76). Apart from Tel Zayit, however, the only possible example of the oblique type from interior Canaan is found in the short inscription incised into a tenth-century (Stratum VI) sherd from Rehob (A. Mazar 2003: 172–74, figs. 1–2).[57] Both the square and oblique forms persist into later Phoenician and Hebrew, though the latter (oblique) type becomes the standard in both traditions. As noted, the Tel Zayit *ḥet* has three horizontals. This three-barred type was predominant in the Phoenician parent script, as seen in the Byblian sequence, though two-barred types are occasionally seen there (cf. line 1 of the Yeḥimilk inscription [*KAI* 4]). The three-barred type is also found in the Gezer Calendar, as well as in other tenth-century inscriptions from southern Canaan, including the Beth-Shemesh gaming board and apparently the Stratum VI sherd from Rehob. The Batash rim sherd, however, displays the two-barred type, as does Arad Ostracon 79 from Stratum XI, the same level that yielded a three-barred type on Ostracon 76. The Arad XI situation anticipates the subsequent development of Iron Age Hebrew *ḥet*, in which both two- and three-barred types are found, sometimes alternating in the same inscription.

The Tel Zayit *zayin* (fig. 21), like its counterparts in the Gezer Calendar and Ostracon 76 from Arad (Y. Aharoni 1981: 99), is large, very broad, and symmetrical,[58] thus recapitulating the Phoenician parent form and anticipating the basic form of *zayin* in the mature Hebrew script. There is no hint, however, of the cursive tick descending from the right edge of the horizontals that developed in later Hebrew script, as consistently displayed in the Samaria ostraca (*KAI* 183–87; *HAE* 1: 79–109, pls. 6.3–8.1; *AHI* 3.1–109; *HI* 423–97) of the early eighth century, for example.

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[57] The comparison is complicated by the fact that the apparent *ḥet* was carved on top of an erroneously written *mem*; see A. Mazar 2003: 173 and n. 4.

[58] The asymmetrical obliqueness of the Gezer form is probably incidental and not palaeographically significant.

Ṭet (figs. 21–22) is large and ovoid. In both these respects, it is reminiscent of the 12th-century ʿIzbet Ṣarṭah form (Kochavi 1977; Demsky 1977), though the resemblance may be coincidental. The Phoenician parent form is smaller and more circular, as seen in the *ṭet* of the Aḥiram epitaph (*KAI* 1, and pl. 1), and it may have been the intent of the Tel Zayit scribe to produce a circular form as he struggled against the hardness of the limestone. On the other hand, the *ṭet* in line 5 of Arad Ostracon 76 (Y. Aharoni 1981: 99), probably dating to the ninth century, is also ovoid in shape (though the stance is not the same), and the Tel Zayit form may have been influenced by the tenth-century forerunner of this cursive type. Unfortunately, *ṭet* is lacking in the text of the Gezer Calendar.

Yod (figs. 21–22) is large and broad at Tel Zayit. In contrast to the rounded, gently curving head of the *yod* of the Phoenician parent script, as illustrated by the Byblian series, the head of the Tel Zayit *yod* consists of horizontal and vertical strokes joined at a rather tight angle. This angular form is also seen in the *yod* of the Gezer Calendar and even the cursive *yod* of Arad Ostracon 80, which the editors assigned to Stratum XI (ninth century?) for palaeographical reasons (Y. Aharoni 1981: 100, 137). In these examples, the tail of the *yod* extends farther to the right than the diminutive tail of the Byblian form, and it is raised slightly above the perpendicular, thus forming an acute angle. The *yod* of Arad Ostracon 80 also has this ascending type of tail, and the same form appears in the Gezer Calendar, though the tail of the Gezer *yod* more often descends below the perpendicular. Both ascending and descending tails persist in the Hebrew *yod* until the late seventh century (when the tail was lost altogether), though the scribes show a general preference for the ascending type.

The descending main stroke of *lamed* (figs. 21–22) is very short, and the hook is broadly and tightly curled. These traits give the letter a strikingly archaic appearance reminiscent of the *lamed* of the 11th-century arrowhead scripts—indeed, of the earlier part of that series (ʾEl-Ḫaḍr, etc.). The standard *lamed* of the Phoenician parent script, as seen in the tenth-century Byblian series, is drawn with a long, straight stroke that descends to the left and then curls sharply up and to the right, forming a rather small hook. This hook is sometimes drawn as a tight curve and sometimes as an oblique angle, with the latter form giving the *lamed* a "check-mark" appearance. In sharp contrast to the archaic, broadly curled Tel Zayit form, the Gezer Calendar *lamed* adopted the check-mark *lamed* of the Byblian corpus, a form that persists in the developing Hebrew script to the end of the tenth century and beyond, as shown, for example, by the *lamed*s introducing the short tenth-century (Stratum VI) inscription from Rehob (A. Mazar 2003: 172–74, figs. 1–2) and the early Iron II inscription from Tel ʿAmal (Levy and Edelstein 1972: 336, fig. 5 [drawing], 340–41, pl. 25:3–4; cf. *HAE* 2: 29–30; 3: pl. 1.3; *HI* 3).

The Tel Zayit *kap* (fig. 22) fits well into the transition from the Phoenician parent script of the tenth century to the independent Hebrew national script. Throughout the Byblian series of the tenth century, the Phoenician *kap* preserves the old trident form. The *kap*s of both the Tel Zayit Abecedary and the Gezer Calendar exhibit a basic modification to this form in which the right stroke of the trident is extended downward and to the left, thus forming the oblique shaft that would characterize the subsequent development of the letter. The Tel Zayit and Gezer *kap*s are similar in other respects as well, although the head of the Tel Zayit form preserves the Phoenician trident more precisely, inasmuch as the other two head strokes of the Gezer form do not meet the main shaft at the same point. Note also that this main shaft or body stroke of the Gezer form is drawn about 60° from the vertical, so that it "leans backward" to a degree that is unusual in the tradition of the South Canaanite and early Hebrew scripts, whereas the body stroke of the Tel Zayit form is drawn about 45° from the vertical—approximately the angle preferred for *kap* in the mature Hebrew script. This is also the angle of the body stroke of another early (ninth century?) example of *kap*, the only letter preserved on Arad Ostracon 77 from Stratum XI (Y. Aharoni 1981: 100), though the length and shape of the stroke cannot be determined because it is broken at the left edge of the little sherd. This break is unfortunate, for it prevents us from seeing whether Arad 77 had yet developed a hallmark of the evolving Hebrew *kap*, viz., a tendency for the lengthening shaft to curve as it descends downward from right to left and then to curl upward at the end. This feature is clearly seen in the Mesha stele (*KAI* 181), where it is a Hebrew trait preserved from the time of the emergence of

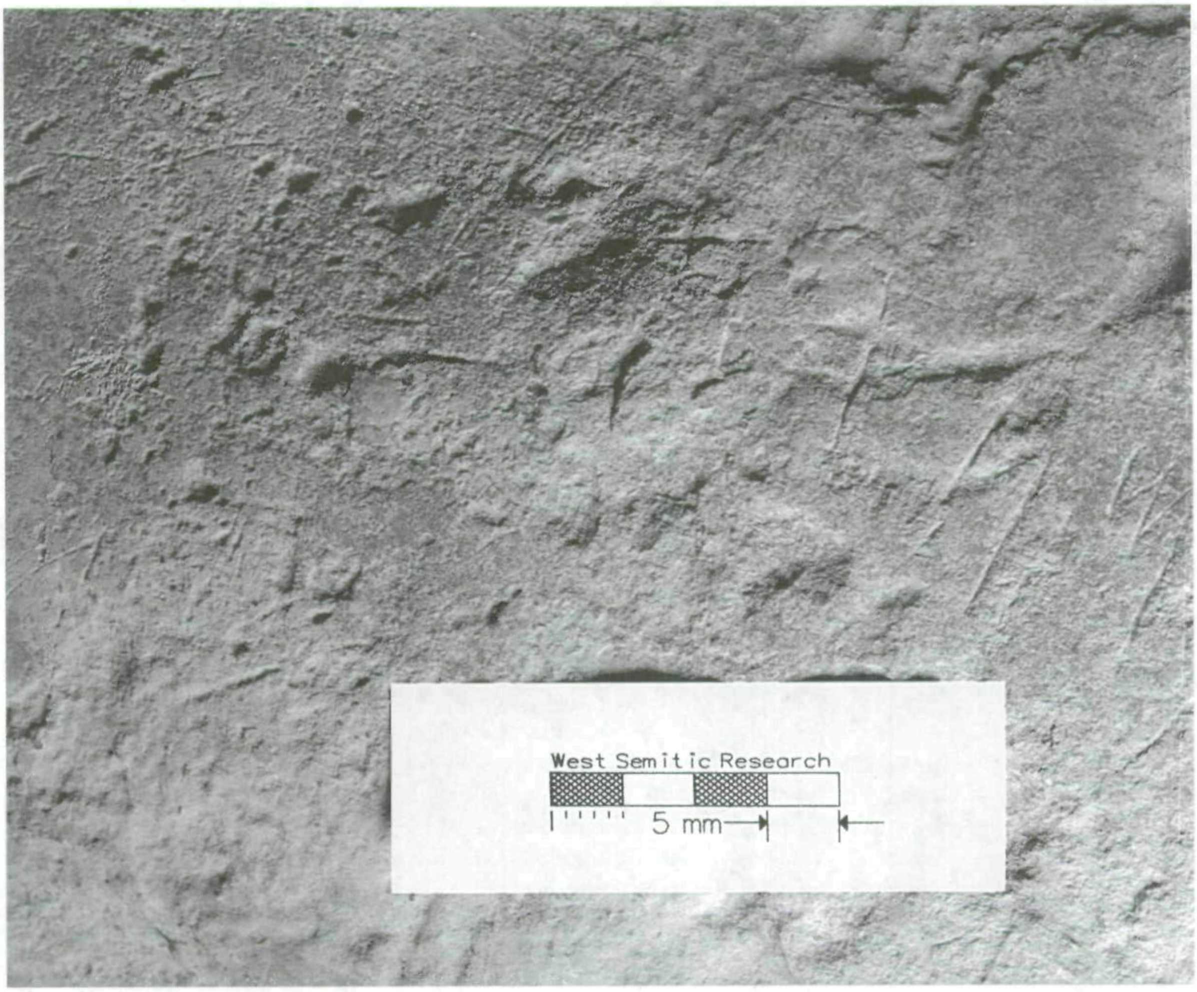

Fig. 23. The Tel Zayit Abecedary: *Mem* through *ṣade*.

Moabite as an independent script tradition, and in the stone bowl inscription of the late ninth century from Kuntillet ʿAjrud (*HAE* 1: 56; 3: pl. 2.10; *HI* 283–84). This bend and curl of the oblique downstroke of the Hebrew *kap* (as well as *nun* and *mem*), which was (as just noted) a distinctive characteristic of the Hebrew national script of the ninth century and later, is not yet present in the *kap* (or *mem* or *nun*) of the Tel Zayit Abecedary or the Gezer Calendar, both of which have straight, uncurved right-to-left descendant strokes.

Mem (figs. 22–23) has a surprisingly advanced appearance when viewed in the context of the rest of the abecedary, with its numerous archaic forms. Prior to the Tel Zayit discovery, the early development of *mem* seemed rather well understood, beginning with the Phoenician prototype. The *mem* of the Aḥiram epitaph (*KAI* 1, and pl. 1) was formed by a vertical zigzag of four roughly equal strokes (the uppermost stroke sometimes being longer than the other three) followed by a fifth stroke that had already begun to elongate slightly into a descending tail. The Aḥiram form persisted throughout the Byblian series of the tenth century (*KAI* 4, 5, 6, and 7, and pl. 2) with only minimal development. This development took two forms: the four-stroke head showed a slight tendency to incline to the left beyond the vertical, and the fifth stroke (the tail) lengthened very gradually. As with the other letters of the alphabet, the developing Phoenician *mem* was the prototype of the *mem* of the tenth-century script of the Canaanite interior, where it is found with very little change except, perhaps, for a tendency for the two forms of palaeographical development just described to take place more rapidly. This has evidently happened, for example, with the *mem* of the incised jar from Tel

ʿAmal Level 3, dated to the latter part of the tenth century (Levy and Edelstein 1972: 336, fig. 5 [drawing], pl. 25:4; *HAE* 2: 29–30; 3: pl. 1.3; *HI* 3; and for the palaeography, Lemaire 1973). The head of the Tel ʿAmal *mem* is noticeably inclined to the left, and the stem or tail is extremely elongated—features that seem clear even though the sign is otherwise somewhat idiosyncratic and difficult to assess palaeographically. These two developments are seen especially clearly in the two cursive *mem*s of lines 1 and 3 of the Stratum XI (ninth century?) Ostracon 76 from Arad (Y. Aharoni 1981: 99), where the heads are bowed to the left and the stems are substantially elongated. As might be expected, the lapidary *mem* that appears in lines 5 and 6 of the tenth-century Gezer Calendar is more conservative than the Tel ʿAmal and Arad forms and stands even closer to the Phoenician prototype. Though the tail or stem of the Gezer *mem* is noticeably elongated (especially in the line 6 example), the head remains fully upright in the old Phoenician manner. This, then, is the development of the tenth-century *mem* as we have understood it. Nevertheless, the Tel Zayit *mem*, despite its well-established tenth-century archaeological context, is drawn with a head that clearly appears to be typologically advanced beyond the Gezer *mem* and even the cursive Arad *mem*. The head is further inclined to the left, anticipating a full rotation into the four-stroke *horizontal* position that will characterize the *mem* of the mature Hebrew script, and the stem has elongated accordingly. In one important respect, however, the form of the Tel Zayit *mem* maintains its archaic character: it preserves the straight, uncurved form of the descending stem or tail. There is no hint of the tendency, seen clearly in the Arad 76 form, for the lengthening shaft of the stem to bend from right to left and then to curl upward at the end, in the manner diagnostic of later Hebrew *mem*. (See the discussion of *kap* above.)

The head of the Tel Zayit *nun* (figs. 22–23) is large and tightly coiled, giving it an appearance that, in contrast to the head of the *mem*, is quite archaic. It is closer in this respect (the tightly coiled head) to the eleventh-century arrowheads than to the tenth-century Byblian sequence. On the other hand, the *nun* of the arrowhead script, especially in its early eleventh-century development, shows little or no elongation of the final stroke, and the *nun* of the Byblian sequence shows only minimal elongation of this downstroke in keeping with the compact style of the tenth- to ninth-century Phoenician script described above. In this respect, the Tel Zayit *nun* departs from the Phoenician prototype, inasmuch as the descendant shows clear elongation—a characteristic of *nun* and other letters (especially *ʾalep*, *he*, *waw*, *kap*, *mem*, and *reš*) that is an important diagnostic trait of the tenth-century inland script in contrast to its Phoenician parent. The progress of this elongation may be followed in the surviving examples of the inland script. The most primitive in this regard are the two examples of *nun* in the personal name *ḥnn* carved on a gaming board from Beth-Shemesh (Bunimovitz and Lederman: 1997a: 29; 1997b: 48 [photograph], 75–76). The forms of the Beth-Shemesh and Tel Zayit *nun*s are very close, but the latter shows more elongation. Even more elongated are the *nun* of the inscription incised on the shoulder of a Level 3 jar from Tel ʿAmal (Levy and Edelstein 1972: 336, fig. 5 [drawing], pl. 25:4; *HAE* 2: 29–30; 3: pl. 1.3; *HI* 3), the *nun* of the Stratum VI inscription from Rehob (A. Mazar 2003: 172–74, figs. 1–2), and the three examples of *nun* incised on a rim sherd found in Stratum 4 at Tel Batash (Kelm and Mazar 1991: 56, fig. 12; 1995: 111, 113, fig. 6.4; *HAE* 2: 30; 3: pl. 1.4; *HI* 30). (*Nun* does not occur in the Gezer Calendar.) As in the case of *mem*, we note that in all these instances of tenth-century *nun*, the elongated downstroke is straight and thus lacks the tendency characteristic of the later Hebrew *nun* (and already seen clearly in the four *nun*s of Arad Ostracon 76 [Y. Aharoni 1981: 99]) for the lengthening shaft to bend from right to left and then curl upward at the end. (See also the discussion of *kap* above.)

Although the position and general shape of *samek* (figs. 22–23) are clear, parts of the sign, especially at the upper left, are obscured by surface incrustation on the stone. As in the case of the Gezer Calendar *samek*, the horizontal spine penetrates slightly above the upper horizontal. Otherwise, the Tel Zayit *samek* seems unremarkable and similar to the Phoenician prototype found in the Byblian sequence. There is no hint of the cursive tick descending from the right edge of the three horizontals that would develop in the later Hebrew *samek*, as seen, for example, in the abecedaries of Kuntillet ʿAjrud pithos 2 of the beginning of the eighth century (*HAE* 1: 62–63; 3: pl. 4.1, 3–4; *HI* 293–98).

Following the *samek*, the letters of the Tel Zayit Abecedary become more difficult to read (see fig. 17), owing—as previously noted—to the condition of the area of the stone on which they are inscribed. The interpretation of the end of line 1 is complicated by incrustation and abrasion of that part of the stone,[59] and similar problems exist in line 2, where they are exacerbated by a general deterioration of the limestone. (Specific problems afflicting the surface of the stone are explained further in the notes.) Consequently, our identification and analysis of the last seven letters of the 22-letter alphabet are offered with varying degrees of confidence, as explained in detail below.

Pe (figs. 22–23) is large, and the head is broad or open compared with that of the Gezer Calendar *pe*. Nevertheless, the head of the Tel Zayit *pe* is curled, even if less tightly than the Gezer form, and this is a point of contrast, shared by the Tel Zayit and Gezer forms, with the open form of the *pe* of the Phoenician parent script as it is known from the Byblian series. Though a similarly curled form evolved in later Phoenician (and Aramaic), the Hebrew script gradually gave up its preference for the curled head displayed by the Tel Zayit and Gezer *pe* in favor of an angular head, which is already seen in the *pe* of the Mesha stele (*KAI* 181), where it is a Hebrew trait preserved from the time of the emergence of Moabite as an independent tradition. The two types are found together in the Hebrew abecedaries of Kuntillet ʿAjrud pithos 2 of the beginning of the eighth century (*HAE* 1: 62–64; 3: pl. 4.1, 3–4; *HI* 293–98). By the time of the Samaria ostraca of the early eighth century (*KAI* 183–87; *HAE* 1: 79–109, and pls. 6.3–8.1; *AHI* 3.1–109; *HI* 423–97), the angular form has become the dominant Hebrew form.

ʿAyin (fig. 23) is similar in size to (or slightly larger than) the *ʿayin* of the Gezer Calendar, and both are close to the relative size of the *ʿayin* of the Aḥiram epitaph (*KAI* 1, and pl. 1), taken as representative of the Phoenician parent script.[60] In contrast to the round Aḥiram and Gezer *ʿayin*s, however, the Tel Zayit *ʿayin* is ovoid, thus paralleling in this respect the shape of *ṭet*. This departure from the more familiar circular shape of *ʿayin* may have been a consequence of the hardness of the limestone or, alternatively, of the influence of a cursive tradition. (See the discussion of *ṭet* above.)

Ṣade (fig. 23) has a flattened shape that anticipates the later development of the Hebrew form of the letter. The two horizontal strokes of the Z-shaped body of the Tel Zayit *ṣade* are elongated, while the short connecting stroke results in a vertically compressed form that has more in common with the cursive *ṣade* in line 4 of Arad Ostracon 76 from Stratum XI (Y. Aharoni 1981: 98–99, 137) than with the taller Gezer Calendar form. It might be argued that this Gezer form, which is produced by a longer connecting stroke in the Z-shape of the body, is typologically earlier, since it is also seen in eleventh-century arrowhead inscriptions containing *ṣade* in what would become its conventional shape (i.e., the form drawn with four strokes, rather than the other common arrowhead form drawn with two short perpendicular strokes) and in the tenth-century Byblian sequence, as seen, for example, in line 6 of the Yeḥimilk inscription (*KAI* 4; *ṣade* is lacking in the Aḥiram epitaph [*KAI* 1]). This impression (i.e., of the typological priority of the taller form) is reinforced by the appearance of the flattened type of *ṣade* in later Hebrew inscriptions, such as Kuntillet ʿAjrud pithos 2 of the beginning of the eighth century (*HAE* 1: 62–64; 3: pl. 4.1, 3–4; *HI* 293–98) and the Samaria ostraca of the early eighth century (*KAI* 183–87; *HAE* 1: 79–109, pls. 6.3–8.1; *AHI* 3.1–109; *HI* 423–97), though there is no hint in the Tel Zayit *ṣade* of a cursive tick descending from the right edge of the letter form as found consistently in the Samaria ostraca and the later Hebrew script generally. Regardless, however, of the typological status of the flattened body shape of the Tel Zayit *ṣade*, the obliquely drawn base stroke is anomalous,[61] though it seems indicated by close examination of the best photographs and of the stone itself.

The Tel Zayit *qop*[62] (fig. 24) is large and similar in form to the distinctive *qop* of the Gezer Calendar, with its symmetrical, two-chambered design that

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[59] The abrasion at the end of line 1 apparently resulted (at least in part) from a procedure of surface preparation, which was undertaken after the abecedary had already been written and which created a large area of artificially smoothed (but never inscribed) stone to the left of the inscription. This abrasion creates problems for the analysis of the last three signs on line 1 (*pe*, *ʿayin*, and *ṣade*), problems that are exacerbated by scattered deposition of surface incrustation in the same area.

[60] Elsewhere in the tenth-century Byblian sequence, *ʿayin* is significantly larger in relation to the size of the other letters, as seen, for example, in the Yeḥimilk (*KAI* 4) and ʾElibaʿl (*KAI* 6) inscriptions. This seems to be a variation without much palaeographical importance, however, since the Phoenician *ʿayin* of the ninth century and later is characteristically the relative size of that of Aḥiram (or smaller).

[61] There are numerous examples in various Hebrew inscriptions of both vertical and ascending base strokes, but not descending base strokes.

[62] *Qop* stands at the beginning of line 2, which is complicated by the compromised condition of the stone at this point. There are numerous extraneous grooves and pockmarks, including a large, deep gouge immediately beneath the *šin*, which is nevertheless the clearest of the four letters in the line. There is also a substantial amount of surface incrustation. Despite these obstacles, however,

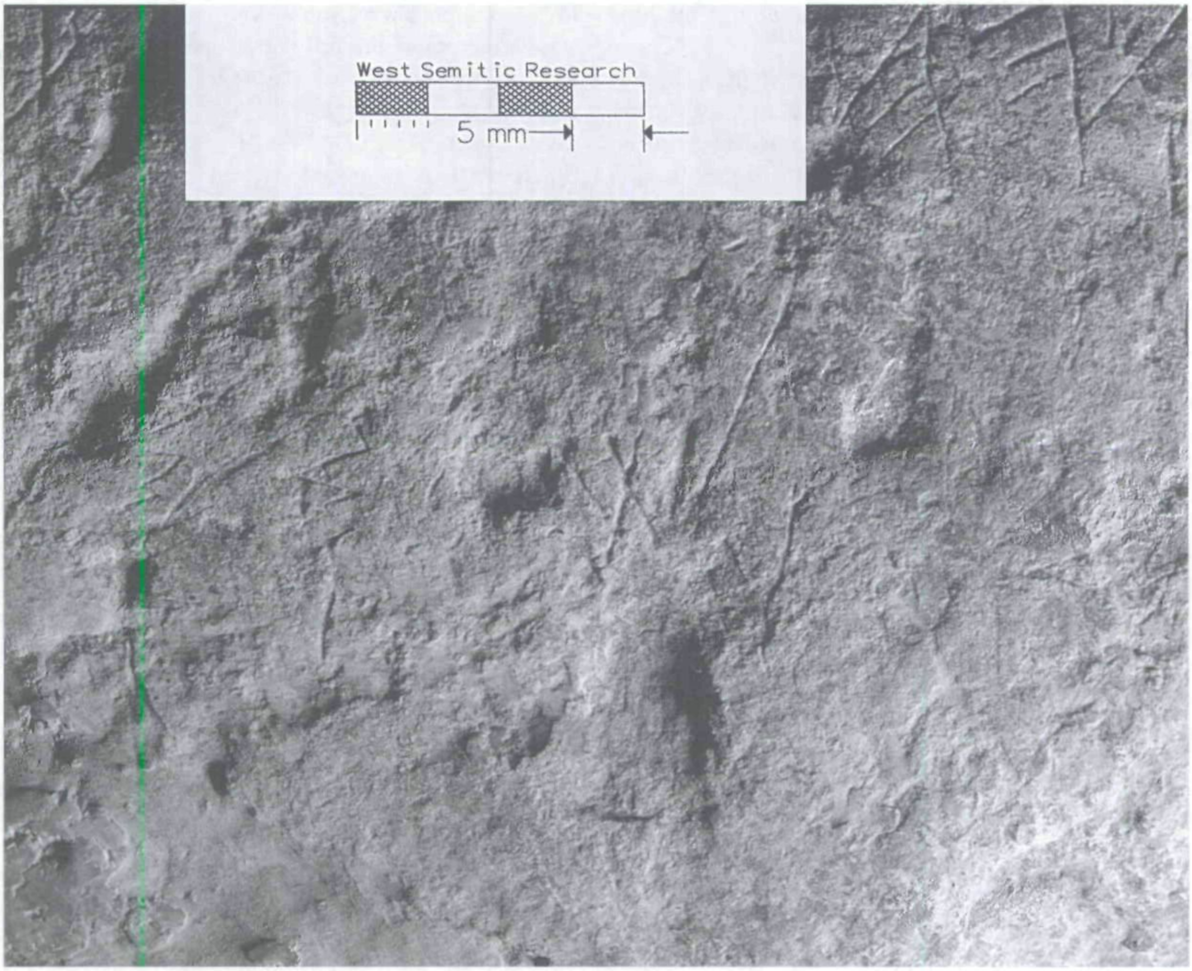

Fig. 24. The Tel Zayit Abecedary: *Qop* through *taw,* plus two zigzag marks at the end of the inscription.

anticipates the subsequent history of the form. The tenth-century Phoenician prototype typically had an oval head bisected by a vertical stem, as seen in line 5 of the Yeḥimilk inscription (*KAI* 4),[63] and this form is also predominant in scripts derived from Phoenician. The Hebrew evolution of *qop* is illustrated by two examples from Arad Stratum XI (ninth century?), which define the point of departure for the subsequent development of the Hebrew script: (1) the *qop* in Ostracon 80 (Y. Aharoni 1981: 100) is symmetrical with an oval, bisected head, a form that persists in Hebrew at least until the beginning of the eighth century, as seen, for example, in pithos 2 from Kuntillet ʿAjrud (*HAE* 1: 62–64; 3: pl. 4.1, 3–4; *HI* 293–98); (2) the *qop* in Arad Ostracon 76, however, has an asymmetrical head and in this respect anticipates the form of the Hebrew *qop*, in which the left and right arcs of the head are drawn separately. The latter, asymmetrical type represents the primary development in Hebrew, and the *qop* of the Gezer Calendar and the Tel Zayit Abecedary anticipates this development inasmuch as the two chambers of the head, though symmetrical, are drawn separately. Note, however, that in contrast to the shape of the primary Phoenician prototype (Yeḥimilk) and its Hebrew progeny, the head of the Gezer–Tel Zayit *qop*, though symmetrical, is not a simple oval but is tapered at the bottom where it joins the stem, giving it an appearance that is distinctive if not unique (cf.

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qop, *šin*, and *taw* may be recognized and described fairly confidently with the help of the best photographs and close examination of the stone itself.

[63] There is no *qop* in the Aḥiram epitaph (*KAI* 1). In the inscription of Shipiṭbaʿl (*KAI* 7), the latest of the six kings named in the five inscriptions of the Byblian sequence, the vertical shaft is attached at the bottom of the head but does not bisect it. In the subsequent development of the Phoenician script this latter type reappears occasionally alongside the more common bisected type.

the similar shape of the head of the *qop* of the Shipiṭbaʿl inscription [*KAI* 7]).

Reš (fig. 24) is difficult to identify in the Tel Zayit Abecedary. It is clear where the approximate position of the sign between *qop* and *šin* must be, but the surface of the stone is somewhat abraded at this point, and the area is intruded upon by a combination of extraneous gouges and geological incrustations. The traces from which we have drawn the *reš* suggest a form very similar to its counterpart in the Gezer Calendar, which perpetuates the shape of the Phoenician prototype as seen in the Byblian sequence. In both the Tel Zayit Abecedary and the Gezer Calendar, however, the descending shaft shows substantial elongation beyond that of the contemporary Phoenician *reš*. As pointed out a number of times above, this elongation, which is an important diagnostic trait of the tenth-century inland script in contrast to its Phoenician parent, is shared with a number of other letters (especially *ʾalep*, *he*, *waw*, *kap*, *mem*, and *nun*).

Šin (fig. 24) is strikingly large compared with the contemporary Phoenician *šin*, as found in the Byblian sequence, and this large size seems to be characteristic of the *šin* of the inland script of southern Canaan in the tenth century in contrast to the Phoenician prototype. Note, for example, the comparably large *šin* of the short inscription (*lnmš*) incised on a late tenth-century (Level 3) jar found at Tel ʿAmal (Levy and Edelstein 1972: 336, fig. 5 [drawing], pl. 25:4; *HAE* 2: 29–30; 3: pl. 1.3; *HI* 3).[64] The *šin* of the Gezer Calendar is even larger. All of these *šins*—those from Tel Zayit and Tel ʿAmal and the three from Gezer—seem rather coarsely executed by the scribe,[65] and the Tel Zayit *šin* in particular is characterized by casually drawn, overlapping strokes.

Finally, the Tel Zayit *taw* (fig. 24) is a +-type *taw* retained from the Phoenician parent script, as seen in the Aḥiram inscription (*KAI* 1, and pl. 1) and the Byblian sequence in general. Though the sole occurrence of *taw* in the Gezer Calendar exhibits a slight clockwise rotation, it is clear that the form the scribe intended to draw was also the +-type. In the subsequent development of the inland script, this +-type *taw* was replaced by the ×-type, which became the standard form of the fully developed Hebrew script, as seen, for example, in the Samaria ostraca of the early eighth century (*KAI* 183–87; *HAE* 1: 79–109, pls. 6.3–8.1; *AHI* 3.1–109; *HI* 423–97). A transitional stage is represented by a mixture of these types, as seen in the various examples of *taw* on the inscribed pithoi of the beginning of the eighth century from Kuntillet ʿAjrud (*HAE* 1: 59–64; 3: pl. 4.1–4; *HI* 289–98).

At the end of line 2, a short distance (10–12 mm) after *taw*, are two apparently nonalphabetic signs (figs. 16–17, 24). Each is drawn as a series of six or seven irregular zigzag strokes in vertical orientation. The shape does not correspond closely to a known alphabetic sign of this or any period, though there is a superficial similarity to much more archaic, vertically drawn examples of *mem* or even *šin*; the closest parallel is perhaps the idiosyncratic *ṣade* of the Tell Fakhariyeh inscription (Abou-Assaf, Bordreuil, and Millard 1982). It seems unlikely, in any case, that this strange pair of signs carries alphabetic (phonemic) value. On the other hand, the two seem to have been deliberately and even carefully drawn, so that it is difficult to dismiss them as random strokes and flourishes haphazardly appended to the end of line 2 by the scribe of the abecedary or someone else. They seem, in short, to have been set in place for a purpose, but in the complete absence of parallels from other inscriptions, we can only speculate as to what that purpose might have been.

PRELIMINARY SUMMARY FROM THE PALAEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

This detailed palaeographical analysis shows that the Tel Zayit Abecedary fits comfortably within—and makes a fundamental contribution to—the small corpus of inscribed objects belonging to the inland script tradition of central and southern Canaan in the tenth century B.C.E. The derivative relationship of the Tel Zayit script, and the inland tradition generally, to the Phoenician parent script is clear, though our abecedary exhibits a few forms (*gimel*, *lamed*, *nun*) that are surprisingly archaic in appearance when compared with their contemporary Phoenician counterparts. In assessing the relative position of the Tel Zayit Abecedary within the chronological development of the tenth-century inland script, the most important comparison is with the Gezer Calendar, which is the only other extensively preserved inscription in the corpus. In this regard, we note that a large number of the corresponding letter forms of these two inscriptions are typologically equivalent—that is, neither the Tel Zayit nor the Gezer form can be said to be typologically more archaic. These include *bet*, *dalet*, *he*, *ḥet*, *zayin*, *ṭet*, *yod*, *samek*, *ʿayin*, *qop*, *reš* (?), *šin*, and *taw*.[66] The Tel Zayit script is typologically later (less archaic) than that of the Gezer Calendar only in the case of one or two letter forms, viz., *mem* and probably *ṣade*. On the other hand, the Tel Zayit script is typologically prior to (more archaic) that of the Gezer Calendar in the case of several letter forms, viz., *ʾalep*, *gimel*, *waw*, *lamed*, *nun*, and possibly *kap* and *pe*.[67] When these findings are combined and evaluated, it seems appropriate to assign to the Tel Zayit Abecedary a typological position near the beginning of the preserved corpus of inscriptions from the interior of southern Canaan in the tenth century B.C.E. A typological position earlier than that of the Gezer Calendar is, in any case, indicated. These considerations suggest an absolute date for the Tel Zayit Abecedary no later than the mid-tenth century B.C.E. This conclusion is consistent with the late tenth-century date of the fiery destruction of the architectural structure in which the inscribed stone was installed, as explained in the stratigraphic analysis above.

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[64] Levy and Edelstein interpreted the sign as "peut-être . . . une indication numérique," but its identity as a *šin* was pointed out by Lemaire (1973).

[65] With reference to the incised Tel ʿAmal inscription, Lemaire (1973) characterizes the *šin* as "tracée régulièrement à cette époque en quatre traits descendants, mais dont les quatre traits sont mal joints, phénomène qui ne doit pas surprendre dans un incision."

CONCLUSIONS AND HISTORICAL IMPLICATIONS

The importance of having recovered the inscribed Tel Zayit stone from a secure archaeological context can hardly be overstated. Palaeographers always hope for this circumstance when a new inscription comes to light, but unfortunately such situations have all too infrequently attended epigraphic finds in the Levant. Many of them have come from compromised archaeological contexts (e.g., the unstratified Gezer Calendar and the ʿIzbet Ṣarṭah abecedary, the latter of which was preserved on two separate ostraca joined after their recovery from pit fill) or have no known provenance data at all (e.g., almost all the inscribed arrowheads from Lebanon). By contrast, the Tel Zayit stone derives from a well-preserved, primary archaeological context, which anchors in a specific time period the conclusions drawn independently from a palaeographic analysis of the inscription itself. At the same time, and reciprocally, these independent palaeographic conclusions confirm and help refine the stratigraphic analysis of the stone's archaeological context. This complementarity of palaeographical and archaeological evidence holds unique value not only for the interpretation of the inscription, but also for our general understanding of the material culture and history of southern Canaan in the tenth century B.C.E., the period from which the inscription derives.

This new understanding seems timely and particularly important in view of the current debate over the interpretation and absolute dating of the archaeological data scholars have customarily associated with the tenth century. Though a substantial number of excavated sites have attested early Iron Age strata, debate over the archaeology and history of the tenth century has continued; and, sadly, the paucity of stratified epigraphic material from this period has severely limited the potential of palaeographical study to bring clarity to the discussion. Despite the survival of several major inscriptions in the primary coastal tradition of tenth-century Phoenicia (the royal Byblian sequence), understanding the palaeography of inland Canaan in the tenth century B.C.E. has lagged due to a scarcity of data, with the Gezer Calendar having until now stood alone as a substantial inscription from the period. The Tel Zayit discovery, however, promises to alter this situation dramatically by allowing epigraphic data to take their place alongside the archaeological evidence. To begin, the secure findspot of the Tel Zayit Abecedary not only adds a second major inscription to the corpus from inland Canaan, but also makes possible a correlation between the developing script sequence and the extensive body of archaeological information that has been gathered from sites throughout southern Canaan. Moreover, the secure terminus ante quem of the inscription's archaeological dating precludes a facile lowering of its individual letter forms and alphabet as a whole to a later time period; in fact, analysts must now evaluate epigraphic remains from less reliable contexts against the Tel Zayit data.

The abecedary itself displays a certain informality in that the line formed by the individually well-drawn letters is not straight; rather, it wanders up and down over the surface of the stone and thus presents more the character of a graffito[68] than of a formal monument. Whatever the case regarding the formal nature of the inscription, its intended function as part of the tenth-century structure remains uncertain. Possible explanations for its use in this context range from its serving a mundane purpose (with the abecedary representing a scribal practice or instructional text) to a metaphysical role (as part of a rising belief in the alphabet's magical or apotropaic power, i.e., its ability to ward off evil). While the latter phenomenon is currently known only from later inscriptional evidence, its application in this early setting—for the protection of either a single domestic household or an entire strategically located borderland site—seems reasonable enough, though all options remain speculative.

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[66] Even though neither *he* nor *ṭet* occurs in the Gezer Calendar, they are included here since the Tel Zayit *he* and *ṭet* are not exceptionally archaic (which would normally be expected of tenth-century inland forms).

[67] Even though neither *gimel* nor *nun* occurs in the Gezer Calendar, they are included here since the Tel Zayit *gimel* is highly archaic in relation to the Phoenician parent form, and the *nun* is typologically primitive compared with most of the several other attested tenth-century inland forms.

Perhaps most notably, the Tel Zayit inscription provides important new evidence for the use of the linear alphabet in the southern Levant during the tenth century B.C.E. Thus the abecedary, by its very existence, has implications for the sociopolitical development of the region in this period. The letter forms preserved on the stone represent a major watershed in the evolution of alphabetic writing in southern Canaan at the outset of Iron Age IIA, and the principal result of this phenomenon emerged as the mature Hebrew national script of the first millennium. In view of the well-established archaeo-palaeographic chronology of the Tel Zayit inscription, therefore, and the clear cultural affiliation of its archaeological context with the Judaean highlands, we may reasonably associate it with the nascent kingdom of Judah, which by traditional reckoning began as a regionally based, patrimonial kingdom (cf. Stager 2003: 63–74) under David and Solomon in tenth-century B.C.E. Jerusalem. Though the area of the tell that produced the abecedary remains in the early stages of exploration, the overall town planning and quality of construction exposed thus far characterize the tenth-century settlement not as an isolated peasant village, but as a significant town benefiting from centralized control over both natural and human resources in this region. In any event, the appearance of an abecedary in an outlying town some distance from the capital city of Jerusalem demonstrates a movement toward literacy in the extreme western frontier of the kingdom during the mid-tenth century B.C.E.

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[68] To our knowledge the first person to assign the Tel Zayit Abecedary to the category of graffiti was Anson Rainey (personal communication).

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